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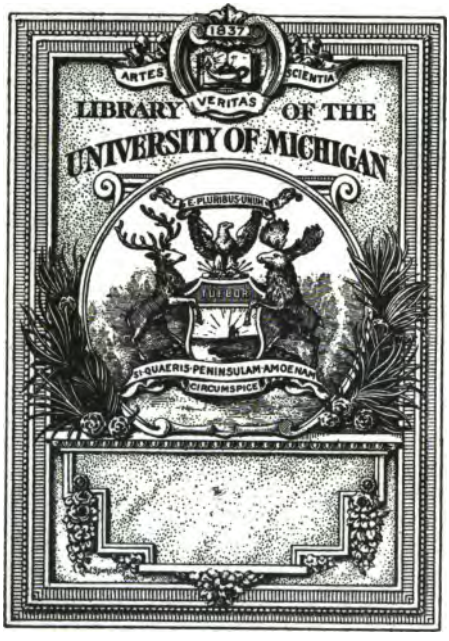
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THE GOOD RED EARTH.

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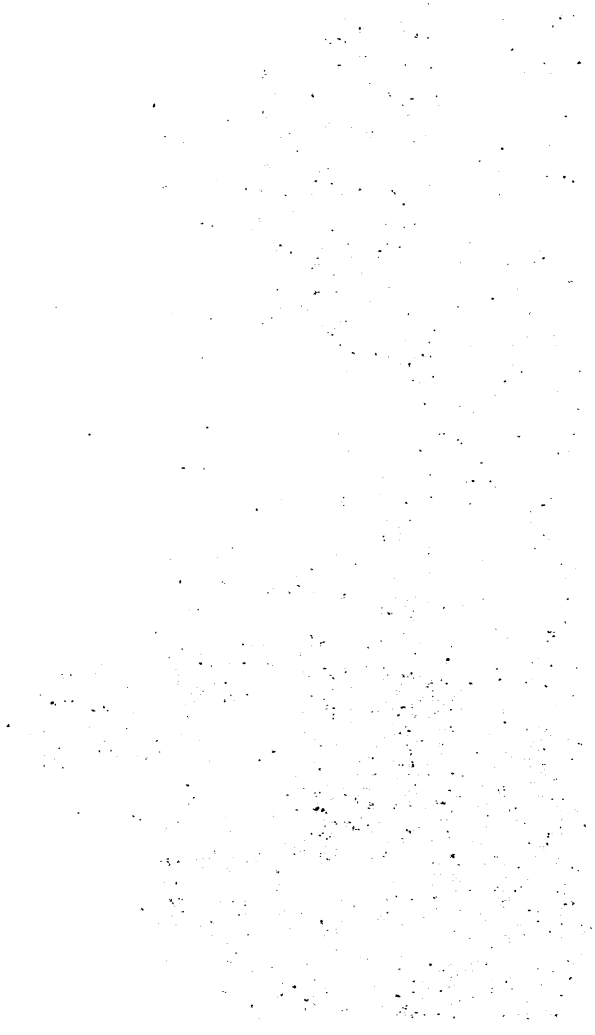

THE GOOD RED EARTH

1749

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF

"LYING PROPHETS," "CHILDREN OF THE MIST," "SONS OF THE MORNING"

ETC.

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THE GOOD RED EARTH.

CHAPTER I.

JACKDAWS AND HEROES.

SHINING upon the lap of Spring like a grey pearl, there lies an ancient and fortified manor house amid red Devon fallows, green hills and orchard lands in full splendour of June. The hamlet of Lower Marldon straggles through a fertile valley of the West Country hard by the sea; and at the confines of this village, where a sheaf of fir-trees rises and tall elms ascend about the way, shall be found Compton Castle, whose time-stained face and crown of ivy appear above an old-world garden spread with flowers. Trim plots of familiar things lie smiling beneath the front of the ruin, and fragile blue and purple, crimson and gold of immortal blossoms yearly renew their glory

before this perishing abode of former greatness. Weather-worn and rich in lichen-livery of years, the notable ruin stands. Above its windows sinister bartizans most grimly frown; tremendous walls, lofty as a prison's, ascend about the rear quarters of the castle; and not a few of its sombre windows and embattled towers remain intact to tell of former strength.

Where now jackdaws chiefly dwell and their harmonies echo, aforetime flourished the famous family of Gilbert; and for the manor itself, before this stronghold arose upon it during the fifteenth century, it suffices to note that one Osolf held these happy valleys in the Confessor's time, that at Domesday Survey they pertained to Judhel of Totnes, and that during the reign of Henry II. the family of Maurice de Pola possessed them. Alice de Pola brought the Manor to the Comptons; and to the illustrious Gilberts it accrued in like fashion, for Joan Compton conveyed Compton Pole, as it was then called, to Jeffrey Gilbert for her partage in the second Edward's reign. Of their posterity are first remembered and evermore revered the sons of Otho Gilbert, whose lady, a maiden of the

Champernowne family, bore not only Humphrey, the adventurer who discovered Gilbert's Straits and established the earliest British settlement of Newfoundland, but also his more famous uterine brother, Walter Ralegh. For upon that Otho Gilbert's passing, his dame mated with Walter Ralegh of Fardel, and by him produced a prodigy—the poet, statesman, soldier, courtier, explorer, and first jewel of Elizabeth's Court. A noble matron truly must have been that Katherine, mother of two such heroes; and less only in honour to these knights were Sir Humphrey's brothers. Of these Sir John, his senior, rendered himself acceptable to God and man by his manifold charities, his virtue and his activity in public concerns; while Adrian Gilbert is declared to have been a gentleman very eminent for his skill in mines and other engineering projects.

Here, within these walls, a tradition, more credible than most, affirms that the half-brothers, Sir Humphrey and Sir Walter, not seldom met; that Ralegh smoked his first pipe on English soil (though ancient habitations not a few claim that event); that the great men discussed their far-

reaching plans together, while both basked in the sunshine of Royal favour and universal acclaim. Yet, at the end of their triumphs, stealing grey along the avenue of years, Death, hideous in one case, violent in both, confronted each with his sudden dart.

Ancient chroniclers declare how, when the little *Squirrel*, a vessel of but ten tons burthen, was bearing Sir Humphrey upon his last voyage from Newfoundland, there took shape before his vision the spectre of a lion gliding over the sea, "yawning and gaping wide as he went," and belching forth a most horrible blast of sound. Upon this monster's disappearance, there rose a tempest, wherein, to calm the shipmen's fears, Sir Humphrey uttered godly wisdom, and, lifting his voice that all the company might hear, cried out, "We are as near to heaven here at sea as at land." Near, indeed, was the great Gilbert to his faith's haven, for that hurricane soon swallowed the little vessel and all thereon. Yet, I think the good knight's memory is green; that his golden anchor, with a pearl at peak, badge of a sovereign's special grace, is not forgot; that his crest, a squirrel, whose living prototype still

leaps in the old fir-trees beside his castle, is yet had in remembrance; and also his motto, worthy of so righteous and valiant a gentleman: "*Malem mori, quam mutare.*" The navigator passed to his great, restless resting-place in 1584; Sir Walter Ralegh, then busy with the colonisation of Virginia, did not kneel at Westminster and brush his grey hair from the path of the axe until Fate had juggled with him through four-and-thirty further years. Then his sword and pen finished their busy labours; his wise, beautiful head fell low at the will of a coward King; and the portion of the great, "well-doing, ill report," was won.

At gloaming time, when the jackdaws make an end for the day, when weary birds rustle in the ivy ere they sleep, and evensong of thrushes throbs through the dimpsy light, loving hearts and eyes, gifted to feel and see a little above the level prose of working hours, shall yet conceive these heroes of old time as moving within their deserted courts. Some chambers are still whole, and bats sidle through their naked windows at the call of dusk; some are thrown open to sun and rain and storm; the chapel stands intact; the scoop for holy

water lies still within the thickness of its wall. But aloft, where rich arras once hid the stone and silver sconces held the torch, Nature now sets her hand, brings spleenwort and hart's-tongue, trails the ivy, the speedwell and the toadflax. Bird-sown saplings suck life from the crumbling mortar; pellitory-of-the-wall hangs its foliage for tapestry; and the huge throats of the chimneys are choked with accretions of dead sticks piled by generation upon generation of industrious daws. A marvellous delicacy of tone pervades the face of this ruin, and ebony, ochre, grey and white lichens spread in a rich texture upon it from fern-crowned battlement to mossy foundation. The great planes of subdued colour sweep from harmony to harmony, shine rosy in the dawnlight or grey under the rain. The sun loves their faces; moonlight weaves them into dream-pictures of ebony and silver. Secret chambers lie hidden within the thickness of the walls; old subterranean ways are suspected; antique hinges and the staples of vanished doors still paint the stones with red rust. Upon the southern side of the quadrangle a kitchen stands; but the banqueting-hall and much of the upper regions

have disappeared, for time has so fretted the granite, so changed its contours, that only antiquary may speculate or architect hazard of what aspect was the manor house in its youth and prime.

Ivy-mantled, solemn, silent, it stands like a sentient thing and broods with blind eyes upon ages forgotten; when these grey stones still echoed neigh of horse and bay of hound, rattle of steel, blare of trump and bustle of great retinues, where was open house in the spacious days. Under June's soft green shadows the castle lies; and History has no thrilling page devoted to it, for Compton's scanty story is at once inglorious and unstained. No unhappy spirit haunts its desolation, and the mighty dead, despite their taking off, revisit these glimpses of the moon no more. Good red tilth winds round about, and the clank of plough and cry of man answers the chime of the jackdaws; grey boughs of ancient orchards stretch to the walls; bluebells, forget-me-nots, pansies and columbines are budding at the great entrance; a tortoiseshell cat, her little paws tucked beneath her, sits upon the

"upping-stock" or mounting-block, wherefrom many a hero leapt to horse in Devon's golden age.

So we find the place, at the time of misty-eyed young Spring, and observe within this theatre from olden days the figures of a man and a woman.

CHAPTER II.

A TRUST.

THE Castle of Compton was not wholly deserted, for in the past a caretaker occupied some chambers at the southern corner of it. Thomasin Hatherley's tenure dated back to memories already more than a generation old; for after long and worthy service with the Baskervilles—latter-day lords of the manor—she had been rewarded with this sinecure, and since dwelt very comfortably at Compton. Evidences of splendour marked the rooms rendered habitable for a caretaker's needs, and in chambers, lofty and airy for the time of their erection, the widow Hatherley dwelt with a grandchild, and a brother some twenty years younger than herself. So at least the relationships obtaining between these three persons was understood by all men, from Sir Archer Baskerville, Squire of the Marldons, downward. Sibella Hatherley ministered to her aged grandmother, did the necessary work of

the household, and conducted chance visitors over the ruined castle—a labour her grandparent had reluctantly relinquished after she reached the age of 85; Joshua Hatherley—a man of lowly intelligence—worked as a labourer on the farm of the Gilberts, where it rose in a nest of orchards upon a slope over against Compton; and ancient Thomasin herself, now fallen upon the last waning dusk of a life unusually long, sat and dreamed—by the ingle during winter, among the flowers in summer-time—of the days left far behind her.

She sat there now on a June morning in an old canvas chair made for her by a husband dead these thirty years. Beside the dame stood an open Bible on a little table; and all around was the flow of the sap, the full choir of the birds and the pulses of a world waking again, quickening again to the last seed in the sun-kissed furrow, to the least spore of fern within some mossy cranny of the castle walls.

Full of thought sat Thomasin, and she ran one bony finger up and down over the knotted veins that laced her other hand.

"Gone!" she was thinking. "Cut off in the

fulness of his strength. A man as might have stood to work for twenty year an' more accordin' to Nature. An' me laggin' wi' three figures starin' me in the faace a'most. Then who 's to keep my secret for Sib? Who 's to be trusted now? Somebody must knaw for certain; but when a body gets to fourscore an' ten, her doan't put no gert belief in men folks. . . . Parson might have been thought worthy; but he thinks of nought but foxes, and he 's dazzled by the Pope of Rome seemin'ly—do preach in a windin'-sheet, or some such fantastic contrivance, 'stead of a orderly black gownd. Who 'd trust such a perilous popinjay wi' bank-notes? . . . Gilbert gone! 'Twas awnly essterday I was mindin' the old time an' the far-reachin' bitterness when Mary Gilbert—maiden name Moss—took the farmer when she might have had the Squire. An' Baskervilles be that peacock-proud, by reason that they comed to England wi' the French afore the Word of God, like they Pomeroys and other foreigners of high renown. . . . Who to tell?—Who to trust? There 's Dick Gilbert, of course; but he 'm awnly a green youth, an' so set 'pon Sib that——"

The dame's musings were cut short at this juncture, and she dismissed a problem very disquieting and too difficult for her aged brains. A man appeared, and came slowly towards the Castle; then, stopping before Gammer Hatherley, he set down a large wicker basket covered with American cloth, mopped his forehead, and shook hands with the ancient woman.

"Ah, Maister Newte, you 'm always a pleasant sight for a auld sawl," she said.

Some, however, might have differed from the dame. Alpheus Newte was plump and florid and, at present, very warm. A great humour lighted his small eyes, and they twinkled like a pig's from between fat lids and under black eyebrows. His clean shorn face was round, his forehead broad and pimply, his mouth large, and his teeth faulty. An almost clerical garb was affected by Mr. Newte, although his occupation—of travelling pedlar—might not seem at first glance to promise a mind cast in particularly pious mould. But this packman had more talents than one, as shall appear, and he never allowed a natural fluency of speech and a predilection for public speaking to remain unexer-

cised. These gifts were of unquestioned service, and our "Johnny Fortnight," as such itinerant wanderers were called fifty years ago in the South, contrived to make a very respectable living by employment of a wide tact, ready humour, and a native shrewdness that rose almost to genius in rare moments, but sank to craft more often.

To look at him was to laugh, despite his dirty-white tie and respectable hat; but he knew when and where to trust his comic gifts, when to conceal them, when to quote Scripture. Those who called him "Johnny" were most numerous, and they urged him to abandon the chapman's life, become a mountebank, and add a little to the world's laughter. Others, who spoke always of "Mr. Alpheus Newte" and rebuked the lighter sort for their opinion, also believed that this man was spending his time to poor purpose; but they held that his place was the ministry. There seemed to be the germ or nucleus of a new sect in Alpheus Newte, and Mr. Cloberry, a serious-minded farmer from Upper Marldon, held so firmly to this opinion, that he offered the wanderer a lofty and well-ventilated barn, standing upon the high road to

the mother church of the district, and promised to fit it up with all necessary furniture, if Alpheus would play pastor, and henceforth confine himself to a local career in that capacity.

This matter was now under Mr. Newte's consideration, and the prospect appealed to him in various ways; yet he had almost decided against it, for the chances of practical success were doubtful. The Church was strong in Upper Marldon, and Farmer Cloberry had blown hot and cold on more than one occasion.

Now ancient Thomasin was of those who held Alpheus a leader of men.

"Sit down," she said. "Get a chair out the kitchen an' bide in the shade; then speak a comfortin' word to a auld woman. A burnin' an' a shinin' light, like what you be, didn't ought trapse the country wi' a gert basket full o' fal-lals an' trinkrums—all foolish toys to catch sweethearts."

"Burning an' shining I am, mother; but 'tis the sudden fierceness of the sun on a carcase prone to fatness. There's nothing like an honest heart to breed fat. The Word, I see. What a lesson you are to the rising generation!—a beautiful Christian

life, with the blessed Word always within a yard of your elbow, as it should be."

"You've got it in your head, which be better. But memory's a vain thing at my time of life—an' power of sight be likewise vain. Tell a comfortin' speech, will 'e, as soon as you've got your wind back. I be down-daunted this marnin' along o' Farmer Gilbert's sudden death."

"Like the grass of the field—a glory to-day, to-morrow cast into the oven. Not that there's any oven heating for Gregory Gilbert—a very good, upright man."

"He was proud, however, an' reckoned he comed of better stock than Squire's self. Gilbert's was a gert name wance, and built this rubbishy auld place, so I was taught when I comed here; but he—the man that's dead—couldn't show no certain claim, for his folks have been working farmers and cider-makers so long as any livin' body can mind. An' that's enough to go upon. But a gude man; an' his death's a trouble to me for more reasons than wan. Now cheer me, will 'e? I've falled back 'pon the Auld Testament of late; an' it do look a'most as if God

A'mighty were busier then than now. He was down 'pon the evil-doer like Doom in them days; now 'tis shocking the number of rascals that flourish even wi'in a walk of this parish, to name no names."

"His eye is on them, ma'am; the Lord's hand will fall just at the critical pitch. 'Twas always the same. He gives this generation plenty of rope—to hang itself with. There's a day of reckoning, and that nearer than some of us guess. No son of Adam will escape."

He mopped his face, dried his hot neck underneath the collar, then turned to the Bible.

"Been readin' about the man awnly this marnin' —Adam, I mean," said Gammer Hatherley. "Very fust word he tells is fulish—as if anybody could hide hisself from the Lard!"

"A many have wanted to, however," said Mr. Newte. "And 'twas a decent wish, come to think of it, for the good soul hadn't a stitch to his name at the time."

"He wasn't very well eggicated, poor twoad, for sartain," allowed the old woman, tolerantly. "'Mazin' thing is how much he did knaw. But for

the mercy of God he'd have been a full grawed zany—a fool, to say it wi'out onkindness."

"A fool, no doubt, mother," admitted Alpheus. "And the fools have done more harm in this world than the knaves, as you can very well see in Adam's case. For why? Because there are more of them, and they breed wonderfully free, do fools. You may have noticed that, if you 've cast any particular thought to the parents of long families. Yes, one of the most unfortunate things that ever happened, Mrs. Hatherley, is that God Almighty, in His inscrutable wisdom, made our first parent so simple. To think of missing the Tree of Life—planted there under his nose! I speak as a mere man when I say it, of course."

Mrs. Hatherley nodded. It was a subject that greatly interested her.

"And growin' still in some outlandish foreign plaace so like as not," she said.

Mr. Newte smiled at the thought.

"If I had a hope to find it, I would go to the tropics as a missionary," he declared. "To think the tree 's there, and nobody to eat of it and become immortal but monkeys! An immortal

ape, ma'am, is a very unquieting thought, I assure you."

"So 'tis then, an' a creepy beast best of times. Such things better not be spoke even by you. Now tell a bit if you 'm rested. Theer 's many matters I want to put afore 'e to-day."

Mr. Newte sat down, took the great Book upon his knees, scanned the family history boldly written upon the first leaf, and then, turning to the New Testament, read the first verse that met his eye, and proceeded to expound it in an amiable, pedestrian fashion. The humorous bent of his mind led him in one direction; the necessity of keeping his reputation with Mother Hatherley chastened his tongue. He spoke for half an hour with glib choice of words, then ceased and asked for some cider.

With grunts and groans the old woman rose and bid her friend accompany her into the house. Here certain old chambers above stairs were turned into sleeping-rooms, a back-place was used for washing and cooking, and in a front apartment the Hatherleys dwelt.

Hither came Thomasin after Newte, familiar with

its position, had visited the cider barrel. Then she bid him sit down and listen to her difficulties.

"You must knaw," she said, "that Gregory Gilbert an' me have been friends since boy an' gal, though he, an' his faither afore him, was allus in a much higher way of life than me an' mine—my faither bein' no more 'n gamekeeper to Sir Archer Baskerville's grandfather. But chance thrawed us together here an' theer; an' in the matter of his wife, Mary Gilbert, I did un a gude turn now an' again an' carried letters between 'em. About the lifelong hatred betwixt the Baskerville of this generation an' the Gilberts, I need not tell 'e. That's not to the point. All I want from you is to take a trust an' fill Greg Gilbert's shoes in the matter of my gal Sibella. Parson I don't trust, for the man's a heathen, an' won't even promise me that little lew corner in Marldon churchyard my heart's been set on these forty year. He sez in his lewd way, 'Fust come, fust sarved,' which ban't a purty fashion to speak to a auld woman; an' now the graves have reached the very place I be hankering arter, an' as that Tabby Strickland up the village is like to die afore me, though younger by two year,

her 'll have the spot, an' I 'll be put out in the sun, wheer they baggerin' childer play between school. An' so I won't trust the man; but you 'm differ'nt. I can trust you. A poor orphan would be safe in your hands."

"I hope so, indeed. Was Gilbert a trustee for your granddaughter then?"

"I don't knaw nothing about such words as that; but I left him wi' a secret, and as he 'm gone afore me, 'tis time I looked around for somewan else to carry it. Do 'e see thicky li'l piece o' furniture in the corner o' the room?"

"I do. It 's worth a good bit of money. Old Sheraton, and a very beautiful specimen."

"So Squire sez. He 've offered me five pound for it; an' wance, when I reckon he was market-merry, to say so wi'out disrespect, he offered me ten pound. But theer 'tis, an' I won't part wi' it, though the thing may be sold for Sib arter I 'm gone if she pleases. My husband got it at a li'l sale down Brixham way, an' awnly paid ten shillin' for it, awin' to nobody knowin' nought about its value. An' theer 's the fust li'l socks as ever Sibella's faither wore in 't, wi' other family matters. Now

take the key from out of that yellow stoneware dog 'pon the mantelshelf, will 'e? Then unlock the cabinet."

Mr. Newte obeyed, and opening the door of the little bureau, peered in with bright black eyes.

"Ah, you'm glazin' sharp, my son, but you don't see nought, do 'e?"

"Only a pair of infant's socks, mother. Beautiful wool, too. We don't spin such wool in these days."

"He lies in heathen ground under heathen trees, poor blid. A good son accordin' to his lights, but not so good as my eldest what was took off by a reapin' machine. Now press floor of the thing an' pinch the little knob underneath; then you 'll see."

The man did as he was bid; whereupon a gap suddenly appeared at the back of the cabinet, and a secret receptacle stood revealed. Within it he found a bundle of blue documents fastened and sealed with red wax, and a flat tin box.

"Leave the papers, but fetch out the box. Then open it an' count 'em."

Johnny Fortnight gazed with frank admiration. He licked his lips, then his finger.

"Ten pound notes they be, an' never in a dirty

hand yet. Count 'em, please. That's my Sib's money. It goodied up to a thousand pound five years ago. Then Gilbert, as had it out to interest for me, told me something had gone scat, an' I growed frightened an' reckoned I wouldn't trust the stuff out in the wicked world no more. My husband sweated fifty year for it as under-gardener to the Court, an' I worked my fingers to the bone for it up to West Lodge, and at the House too—not to name the extra hundred when I was wet-nurse to present Squire an' saved his life by all accounts. An' I'll have the money onder my own eye henceforth till I pass away. There's a thousand pounds, or I'm a liar."

"A thousand pounds to a penny. 'Tis a great deal of money to have here, Mrs. Hatherley."

"Safer here than out in the world. Only you knows about it, now Gilbert's gone. I wouldn't tell my awn brother, 'cause he've got sticky fingers where money's the question; nor yet Sibella. Because a gal as knawed she'd got all that to her fortune would be like to toss her head tu high an' grow spoiled. 'Tis to be hers when I die—not afore."

"Her age at present?"

"Eighteen."

"And the documents?"

"They 'm hers tu; though what 's in 'em I don't know more 'n the dead. Not so well for that matter, for, thank God, I was never curious. You see two children was all ever I had. Fust died 'pon the land—a braave young youth stricken down in his strength by wan of them cussed new-fangled things wi' more knives to 'un than the dowl 's got teeth; t'other went to furrin paarts, havin' a call as some do to turn his back 'pon his native plaace. Africa 'twas he went—wheerever that may be. Faither knawed—my husband I mean—but I never did. He went at thirty, and he married outways, a English gal. There was a darter as the mother lived to kiss, an' no more. An', come a few year later, my William sent the little maid home along wi' fifty pound. An' a while after, just afore he was comin' back hisself to pay us a visit, the black savages falled upon him, and tore down his farm and killed him, as we heard long after. But them papers comed with the little child, an' a message that the whole

packet was to be give to Sib 'pon her turnin' one-an'-twenty. 'Tis about her mother's people; an' I ban't noways interested in them; though Sib must see to 'em for herself, if she so wills, when she comes to read what 's set down."

Mr. Newte stroked the money.

"Dear little maid," he said. "Your unfailing good sense, mother, seems to show itself in this choice of me, if I may say so without self praise. Your secret will be safe enough. I will share it with the old cabinet; and after you have gone to your reward, I will be—a—grandmother to dear Sibella. I cannot take your place, but I will watch her and shield her for love of you."

"Caant say no fairer; an' I 'd ax you to take just a slip of that tissue yourself, Maister Newte; awnly I knaw such things is all wind in the trees and vanity to a man of your high stamp."

Mr. Newte stroked the money again.

"Mere paper," he said. "Thank God, mere paper—to me. Yet more powerful than gunpowder—the stuff that spins the world, ma'am. Yes, she shall have it safely, and the documents also, in fulness of time."

"I 'm sure you 've took a weight off of me, and if you could but ordain for me to lie in that lew corner of the churchyard, I 'd die happy to-morrow. Here 's the maid comin'. Pop the money away quick, will 'e ?"

Sibella entered, as Alpheus Newte hastily closed the cabinet.

"Funeral 's for Thursday, granny dear," she said; "an' 'tis hoped you 'll go if a good day with you. Mrs. Gilbert be goin' herself. Dear sawl, she 's heart-broke, Dick believes, but awnly he guesses her sorrow, for none can see it."

"Stern stuff. Woman of fewest words ever I met," said Gammer Hatherley. "She 've gude call to weep whether or no, for never a better man than her husband filled a grave tu soon."

"It occurs to me," murmured Mr. Newte, "that I might go across to the Farm at once. A word in season—balm for the sore spirit, mother. Yes, and some neat mourning rings, not to mention certain trinkets in bog oak and some black satin ribbon and various jet adornments. My basket is fitted with compartments. At the mention of death my eye grows sad, and I turn to the bottom of it. A birth

finds me in the upper stratum—soft flannels, corals, violet powder, dill-water, and so forth. Yes, and a wedding—that's the largest division in the middle. All summed up, you see, in those three compartments—all there—the whole needs and necessities of human clay, from a napkin to a winding-sheet. And cheap—God, He knows how cheap. I often wonder myself by what means I live. However, He feedeth the sparrows."

"Honesty be the best policy," said Mrs. Hatherley.

"And generosity the worst," declared Alpheus. "Yet some people's smiles are as good as other people's money, and I've got a heart like butter. Sibella, my dear, here's a little thing in my basket that will be proper to this sad ceremony. It need only cost a 'thank you.'"

She followed him, and presently returned with a large black locket on which the letter S appeared.

"He had a whole alphabet of them in the funeral compartment," she explained. "And it opens, granny, and there's a place inside for the hair of the person that's dead—or somebody else's."

CHAPTER III.

FUNERAL BAKED MEATS.

ON the bosom of a great hill that rose to the east of Compton Castle appeared Orchard Farm. To-day it stood above acres of snow and crimson where a sea of blossom, musical with murmur of unnumbered bees, rippled to its whitewashed walls. Beyond and above there stretched great hay-fields shimmering with heat and twinkling with light under the caress of fitful breezes. The thrush was in the elm, the lark on high; life sang and gloried in the golden hour; yet the farm stood desolate, for its lord was no more. The blinds were drawn, and small bows of crape dotted the straw beehives, where an old labourer, heedful of the ancient saying, had set them.

As the morning waxed to noon, a black procession wound away from Orchard Farm, and Gregory Gilbert's dust entered upon its last journey. In Upper Marldon churchyard they laid

him, and his wife's tearless eyes roamed over the faces of the large gathering beside his grave; but she saw nobody, and stood in reality as blind to all surroundings as her son, who wept openly, and let the tears run down his brown cheek without heed or hindrance.

The dead man had been known far and wide for a Christian in his deeds. Simplicity, self-denial, honesty, were the corner-stones of his life. He had dealt uprightly with his neighbour and with the world. And so it came about that his name was honoured and his passing deplored. A company of near three hundred crowded the little burying-ground, where it lay beneath the embattled towers of St. John Baptist's Church, and, behind the coaches of the mourners, had followed carriages not a few conveying empty compliment from those of higher estate than the dead. The chocolate and yellow chariot of the Baskervilles alone was missing; yet though that ancient family had lorded it over Upper Marldon for many generations, and, indeed, inhabited "The Court," the sole mansion of note within half a league, yet none wondered at the circumstance, for the country-

side knew the story of that feud pertaining between these families and the romantic event responsible for it.

The necessary incident may be related here. When Britain entertained an angel unawares and Victoria of blessed memory first ascended to her throne, one Mary Moss was the beauty of Lower Marldon; and Archer Baskerville, his father's heir, had proposed to her and bid her fly away with him until such time as his parent's wrath should wane. But the girl was not heart-whole, and, to this notable lover's fiery indignation, declared that Gregory Gilbert, Farmer Gilbert's son, had her abiding promise. There the matter ended. Archer, a hot youth, just down from the University, soon married one in his own station, but he never forgot or forgave the slight put upon him by a mere scrivener's daughter. Some ten years later Mary married her true lover, and in the course of time each husband filled his father's place. The farmer reigned on the hill by Compton Castle, and Sir Archer Baskerville entered into a patrimony that embraced the Marldons and certain fertile regions stretching over the hillsides

above Torbay, tending to the silver Dart westwards, and easterly approaching the little village of Kingskerswell. He owned many farms on the good red earth; but Orchard Farm lay without his tenure —a freehold from ancient times. Herein another grievance existed, because successive Baskervilles had offered high prices to successive Gilberts for the orchards and acres here outspread in the midst of their own. But no success attended their proposals; indeed, the present head of the Baskervilles had made none, for the name of the yeoman's family was gall sufficient within his cup. Sir Archer's wife had been a damsel of the Caunter race, and evil fortune attended her alliance; for the lady died of consumption before her thirtieth year, though she left an only son of five years old behind her. The child of many prayers and hopes, justifying neither, fell by some streak of atavism upon the character of his mother's ancestors, and proved a compound of such characteristics as had qualified him for distinction under a Drake or Ralegh, but made him a nuisance to those who loved him in early Victorian times. The wild hawk in Roger Godolphin Baskerville took him, under a parent's hearty curse,

abroad; nor was that all. He became engaged upon the voyage, and married as soon as possible after landing in Africa. The particulars of his alliance none ever knew; man and wife vanished beyond the ken of those at home; and from that time to the period at which this narrative begins, no information respecting the heir of the Baskervilles had reached civilisation. It was believed that he had perished in Central Africa, and that old Mrs. Hatherley's younger son had known of him there. William Hatherley, once his groom at The Court, had always been the lad's confidant, and a secret understanding obtained between them, so that they left England about the same time and rejoined company as master and man in Africa. But Sir Archer Baskerville cared nothing that his disobedient offspring was silent, and he made no effort to communicate with the youth or become reconciled. He hated heartily those who misused him, and his pride was of the feeble sort that takes any attack on personal esteem as an offence not to be forgiven. His son Roger, who had thus set him at nought, was therefore cast beyond the pale of pardon; even as Mary Moss, when she refused his heart,

incurred the man's unsleeping enmity and brought the same as a dower to her husband and to her offspring.

Richard Gilbert and his mother drove home together in the funeral coach, and she let her son take her hand between his and press wordless comfort there. She wept no tear and said no word. Her nature was taciturn above common in woman, yet those who knew her and loved her found her eyes a home of speech and understood the language of them. She had grown thin of late years, but her energy waned not at all.

"God be good to you, dear mother," said Richard. "If ten years were only passed. We're so near him still—my father. Life looks black to me—what must it look to you?"

She regarded him thoughtfully, but made no answer.

"The only good belike is to go on doing what he left undone, to till where he bid us till, and plant where he meant to plant, and toil so hard that sleep shall be dreamless and the waking days too full to think. I'll try and be like him, mother; yet an' if I was the daps of him, maybe the more

sorrow for you, because 'twould be a green wound on memory."

But no good son ever bulks as nobly upon a mother's eye as the good father that got him. A wife whose wedded dream has been pure gold must set her husband on a throne above all children. This Mary Gilbert thought and pressed back upon her son's hand gently.

At the farm a funeral feast was spread, and the labouring folk presently shuffled along to the kitchen and took their seats at a table whereon cold joints appeared, with ale and cider and a second course of gooseberry tarts and yellow jellies. Richard presided, but his mother was not present. A great, respectful silence reigned throughout this meal. Once only a woman laughed, when poor Tim Blake — an orchard hand, who was weak in his intellect—tried to put away some jelly in his cotton handkerchief, designing to convey the same to his mother; but John Bridle, head man at Orchard Farm, cried out indignantly:

"Hush your fule's tongue, Anne Mason! Doan't 'e knaw no better than to chitter like a guinea-fowl

'pon a wisht eating like this here? Shame to such a female!"

Anne Mason subsided in ruddy confusion before ten pairs of frowning eyes, and Philip Wonnacott, her lover, glowered at Mr. Bridle and clenched his fist under the table; but Abel Easterbrook, the cellar-man, and others, supported Mr. Bridle. Johnny Fortnight, without any particular invitation, appeared at this mournful banquet, and, upon its conclusion, to the satisfaction of all present save only Richard Gilbert, arose, wiped his mouth, and addressed the throng in a fat voice telling of a full stomach.

He dwelt upon the high qualities of Gregory Gilbert, predicted for him a reward above rubies, commended their new master to the workfolk, and praised Richard to his face in a manner very embarrassing. Mr. Newte proceeded to an item of personal information.

"And, my friends," he said, "I must tell you that this passing of a good and noble creature has turned my own thoughts of late days very seriously to higher things. 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.' Even so.

I have lifted up my eyes unto Higher Marldon, and my help has come from that righteous man, Farmer Cloberry, of the Broad Lands. He, good soul, has been pleased to find in my humble words some indication of power; and his west shippon, instead of sheltering cows from the winter blast, will now shield wayward human sheep from the frosty influence of this wicked world. In fact, five pounds will turn it into a little place of worship—a fold for those who wish to seek the Good Shepherd; and inasmuch——"

"You'm a fule, Johnny Fortnight," interrupted Mr. Bridle, bluntly. "Wi' your gifts o' speech, an' your mug, an' your cock-eye, you did ought to be a public merryman, an' bring folks the blessing o' honest laughter. What's more, theer's better money in it, for I knawed a chap—my brother's wife's cousin for that matter—as painted his nose red, an' wore a red seat to his breeches, an' a child's pinafore, an' went the round of the fairs singin' an' dancin' an' crackin' his fun. An' a very gude livin' he made. The world's so dismal all times that it doan't grudge ready money for laughter."

But Alpheus Newte shook his head.

"Mr. Bridle! And you a man nearer sixty than fifty! To paint my nose red and wear a red seat to—and souls waiting to be saved! Get thee behind me, John Bridle! . . . We commence on Sunday week, friends, and you will all be welcome. I may mention that until the collections enable me to eke out a frugal living in your midst, I shall, upon workdays, continue my business, tramp round and take my basket where its contents may be welcomed. But when the Lord's Day dawns, wet or fine, so long as He wills, I shall rise up in the outhouse of our saintly Cloberry and speak the Message without fear or favour. I may also mention, on Divine authority, that the labourer is worthy of his hire. The man who is called to fight principalities and powers must have the sinews of war if he is to win the battle. This poor fabric"—he slapped his round sides—"this citadel of clay requires constant repair and restoration. The flesh is weak,—it hungers, it thirsts, its clothes wear out. If I was all spirit I should never send round the dish, my brothers. But I am not all spirit. I take my place in the lap

of Nature with the humblest amongst you. For what am I? A candlestick. A humble candlestick cast in my Maker's mould, and by His wisdom furnished with a voice, an appetite, and, as you would say, a corporation with an ample apartment for those forms of nourishment my clay requires. Therefore, that the light may be of first quality, it is our duty to look to the oil. At least I seem to think so. Or, if these poetic figures and similes are beyond the grasp of you simple folk, as well they may be, then I would say if you want good pork you must not spare hog-wash. I could dilate upon the subject, but this is not the place to do so, for we still stand in the Shadow of Death."

Mr. Newte proceeded with copious stream of speech, half unctuous, half humorous; then Richard Gilbert, weary of the man, dimly alive to the sly laugh lurking under his utterances and ill-tuned for humour or cant in that dark hour, rose from the table, sat awhile with his mother in the solitude of the farm parlour, then restlessly went out upon the land. He wandered hither and thither, but finally turned his steps to the scene of the morning, and visited again his father's grave. No flowers had

showered their sweetness upon the coffin-lid, by desire of the widow; but now, where a new mound lay and drooping daisies hung their heads upon the turves that covered it, a little cross of white bluebells appeared. Dick's heart throbbed and his eyes smarted. He knew who had set it there, and, glancing about him, was quick enough to see the disobedient one vanishing through a little gate that led into the churchyard from the north. The place was empty; only a jackdaw cawed and plumed his purple wing on the church-tower; so Dick cried out a name, and the departing one turned at the sound of his voice.

"Sib!"

The girl stopped, came forward, and took the hand that young Gilbert extended to her.

"I 'm sorry," she said. "It was wrong, because Mrs. Gilbert expressly wanted none of them. But your father was so good to me. Last autumn he gave me the little pearly bulbs of my bluebells for a birthday present—an'—an' it seemed vitty as he should have their blooth. Flowers be all we can give the dead, Richard."

"Little he thought when he gave them to you

that their first blossoms would lie on the grass over his head. Mother won't come here till Sunday. Then they'll be withered and gone."

"I'll fling them away on Saturday," said Sibella. "Let them bide till then."

They moved away together, passed into an orchard, and there sat down awhile out of sight from the ferny lane below. A colour dance was on the bough; a fitful snow of petals fell to the touch of breeze and bee. Song saturated the air, as though all things made music at their proper work. A rill wound beside the orchard hedge, and glimmered in green setting of liverworts spread flat on the ruddy earth, and water speedwells springing below; ivy trailed above, and, within the meshes of the stems a round mossy ball grew, where two tiny brown birds, cheering each the other with merry voice, toiled to build the home that Nature taught them. Uncurling ferns, stitchwort stars, and the snowy crests of umbel-bearers arose about the man and maid where they reclined; and her voice was very tender, and her blue eyes soft as rain-bathed April. She cooed to him, yet with never a word of love, and he held her hand, like a little boy—held it

simply without pressure or any sign of passion—held it inert, and listened to her sympathy and praise of the dead. But Sibella knew that Richard loved her; and she loved him the better in that no sign of love shared his heart with sorrow to-day.

"He was such a man as seldom is seen, Sibella."

"I've heard my grandmother say as much. Granny knew how good he was."

Her speech reminded the youth of a circumstance.

"Strange to say that my dear father was thinking of you with his last breath, Sib. Your grandmother Hatherley told him long since, little dreaming that he would die before she did, how she wanted him to know certain things concerning you—'secrets,' so she said. At least I fancied that was the word, though he only could whisper when he told me. 'I promised the auld woman,' he said, 'and my promise I can't keep. So go you along to her and tell her how 'twas not forgotten, and how I ask her to tell you, so that her granddaughter shall have you for friend instead of me. She'll know how 'tis, and be very sure that I'd not sent you if I didn't trust you.' So he spoke. It was all

Greek to me, but it concerns you, so I must see Mrs. Hatherley as soon as can be."

"Granny's contrary and suspicious of young people—even me sometimes. But I lay she'd trust you with all her heart, being the son of Gregory Gilbert. Yet you surprise me, too, for what secret can there be about me that I'm kept from knowing myself? You'll have to tell me, Richard."

He shook his head.

"Time enough when I know. You'd think poorly of me, I reckon, if I broke such a trust even to you. Not to name father. Somehow I can't think him gone. He's out of sight for ever—that's all. We've got to do without sight of him and speech of him. Yet he's nearer to me than conscience still. Please God he always will be."

"'Tis wonderful how things fade out of mind."

"Not such a father as mine—never. I'd let everything go, even to farming, rather than forget him."

The sun brought glory to the West, and the orchards acknowledged his mellowed light to their last petal, where miles of flowers swam in a warm mist of gold. The bees laboured no more, shadows lengthened, and the red light burnt into the good

red earth and set the tilth a-glowing. Blue smoke rose lazily; the rooks came across from the fallow to the forest; kine with full udders watched by meadow gates for the milkers, and peace deeper than content brooded under the sunset.

The church clock struck six, as though unwilling to number such a fair hour with the past; a sundial above the porch told the same tale with a blue shadow upon the blushing slate-face. There man had written in figures, Time, with rusty lichens of gold and ebony. Then the boy rose and went home to his mother, while the girl walked without speech beside him in the gloaming through dim, vernal lanes, by grassy hedgerows, and the dewy cradles of Spring flowers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHERATON CABINET.

WHEN late June had thickened leafy shadows; when ripples of light raced over the ripe hay; when fruit had set in the orchards, after the glory of their flowers was done, save for some chance, solitary, late bearer shining alone in the sea of leaves; on a day of cuckoo songs and sunshine, there came two visitors to Mrs. Hatherley.

Richard Gilbert was the first, and the young man's stay proved brief, for upon reminding the dame of her trust to his departed father, and offering himself as a recipient of the confidence in his parent's place, Dick met a frank negative.

"He was that fond of Sibella," said Richard. "And I 'm sure if I can do anything——"

"You! A young youth of your age! Not so, bwoy, I do assure 'e. Do 'e suppose I've bided till now—me as may drop off like a ripe plum in the night, with no eye to see my passing but my

Maker? 'Tweern't very likely wi' such a gert secret as 'tis. No disrespect to you, but us caan't put auld heads on young shoulders. Rest easy, however, the right man knaws; the matter be in safe hands. Sibella will hear what she've got to thank her granny for come fulness of time. Then her'll pray a blessing, no doubt, and I'll see her prayers a-risin' up, like smoke of burnt sacrifice, to wheer I stand beside the Throne o' Grace."

"So long as an honest man knows what there is to know——"

"Honest and more'n honest, though that's to give a man a gude character in these wild reckless days when ministers o' God go fox-hunting like common men. Honest an' more'n honest. 'A light to lighten the Gentiles;' an' if I doan't knaw, who should?"

Upon this Richard strongly suspected Mr. Newte must be the receptacle of the secret, and tried to prove it.

"There are properer men than me, I know. I shouldn't have come, but somehow, after father specially mentioned it, I felt 'twas my duty. We will leave it there then. I hope you weren't over-wearied

Sunday. I saw you at the new chapel that Mr. Cloberry's rigged out for Johnny Fortnight. A good few churchfolks was there also—just to seek some new thing, no doubt. I went, but mother shook her head when I told her."

"Ah, for all her wisdom, your mother be content to listen to a fox-hunter come Sundays," said Mrs. Hatherley, spitefully. "Newte can talk the t'other's head off, an' pray his head off, tu. Mr. Baring's a better judge of a dog than of a human sawl, an' I'm sure he knaws more about the ways of a hunted hare than the ways of the worm that never shall be quenched. He said out o' the pulpit two Sundays ago, that the fires o' hell were cold ashes now-a-days. Out o' God's holy pulpit that anointed man said it! An' I comed away in the middle—a-chitterin' down the alley wi' both sticks; an' all the people starin'. Ess fay, Baring up an' tawld us as God's Book was a liar, so I counted it time to go. Please the Lard that man won't be called upon to bury me, for not a thew or sinew will rot comfortable if he do. I might even have to walk again to fright the fear of God into un!"

"Doan't say such dreadful things, mother," begged Richard. "I 'm sure Mr. Newte believes what 's right, an' anybody might have said he 'd seen a picture of the brimstone place from the way he described it—down to the red-hot cinders and the poor lost souls skipping on them."

"Ess fay; an' Parson Baring 's so like to skip hisself as any man. He 'll have to mend his ways, or he 'll find what 'tis to have no cool place for the sole of his foot come presently. Now you be off to your mother. An' doan't worrit 'bout Sibella. My gran'darter 's in gude holy hands; an' I can die easy first moment the Lard's mansion be ready for me."

Rather ill at ease, for his ingenuous soul disliked Mr. Newte, Dick Gilbert departed. That night he was to see Sibella after dark in the ruined chapel of Compton. Their excuse for these meetings, which took place with increasing frequency, was marked by a fine poetic imagination and that seriousness of import attributed to nothing, according to the custom of all young folks in a similar pass. For the boy and girl loved one another truly enough; Sib knew quite well in her heart that Dick

must be a Gilbert of the historic race, the greatest man amongst them since Sir Humphrey sailed on his last voyage; and Dick loved with a whole heart this flaxen, Saxon little maid. Were not the Hatherleys of high renown also, and had not they increased the sum of human happiness under Devon apple-trees through generations past?

At Higher Marldon there stood a cenotaph to a Hatherley of Queen Anne's times, whereon was set most generous praise:—

> "Under this monument lies one,
> Did good to many, hurt to none;
> Friended the rich, reliev'd the poor;
> Was kind to all; who can do more?"

That the relationship between this good lady and Sibella did not actually appear, mattered nothing to Richard Gilbert. His heart yearned for the girl, and a love, held in abeyance while his father lived, now cried out to be heard. Only modesty as great as hers, and a limited vocabulary, still kept him silent. He had thought of writing, but scorned the step as cowardly.

The youth now departed, much cast down

that his sweetheart's affairs might not be trusted to him; and as he walked through the scented beds of flowers that spread before the castle walls, a man on horseback passed by, splashed red mud over his gaiters, and drew up at the ancient upping-stock. It was the master of the Marldons and Lord of the Manor.

Of the Baskervilles, a folk not lacking in renown, one has written in their archives how they prospered and waxed through four centuries "without help of gown, petticoat, or apron." And thereby he meant that the family was able through all those years efficiently to maintain itself without any augmentation from a lawyer, an heiress, or a trade. Now direct descent from the senior branch seemed destined to terminate. Sir Archer Baskerville's son was generally supposed to be dead, and, in that event, a distant cadet of the house would succeed to the Marldons.

The old knight was thin and grey, with a high Roman nose, full moustache and whiskers, and bright blue eyes. He carried himself uprightly for all his seventy years, endeavoured to hide his private sorrows under a demeanour much more

impassive than the character beneath it—was just in his own conceit, vindictive in reality and very weak of will. The egotism of Sir Archer, together with his vanity and pride of descent, made him morbidly quick to see and to resent any manner of slight. An offence against himself, it pleased him to regard as an evil done to whole generations of the family. In his person centred the accumulated splendours of his house, and he made it apparent in his very manner of walking that he owned the ground spread under his feet. Yet the old gentleman's heart was soft; there were, indeed, wells of tenderness within him; but there lived not one among his friends capable of lowering any bucket of sympathy to reach them. Like many vain people, he was extremely good-natured, and neither Upper nor Lower Marldon had reason to complain of his generosity. As a landlord, he was easy—as a master, liberal; yet liberty of thought he denied to those who served him, and wittingly would have none who boasted Liberal principles in his employ. Love in his green youth had, indeed, shaken this peacock man, and sent his pride down the wind for a season; but though near half a

century divided the present from a woman's refusal to wed with him, he had never forgotten or forgiven the affront. Now his anger acted passively, as in nature bound, after such stretch of time; but the fancied wrong had petrified into a sort of eternal grievance, and the Squire's eyes and mouth hardened at sight of any Gilbert, even as they did now in presence of Richard. That a woman, who might have been the mother of his children, should have chosen another husband still amazed him when he thought upon it; his eyes had taken the astonishment into their expression and never wholly lost it again. But the house of his enemy remained, and he reflected with bitterness upon his own heir, as he caught sight of the young farmer. Where the hope of the Baskervilles might be—whether in the land of the living or long since departed from it—no man could say with certainty. The father, indeed, had quite decided that his son was dead.

Beside half a dozen old friends, there was but one living woman who called Sir Archer Baskerville by his Christian name; and now he stood before her and shook her by the hand.

"A very good-morning to you, foster-mother," he said. "You're looking younger, I declare. There's bloom upon your cheek for all your years."

Mrs. Hatherley's eyes twinkled. She loved to hear him call her "foster-mother," for the word woke memories of vanished springtime in the ancient heart of her.

"Now I seem you'm at your auld games, when you did want to kindiddle me to your way o' thinkin'. Then you was a babby an' I was a mother wi' milk enough for you an' my awn both. An' you'd come around me wi'out words, then, so easy as you can wi' speech now. You'd coax and cuddle me to your way o' thinkin', an' you'm the same Archer now as then. Sit down an' have a tell, theer's a dear sawl. Haven't seed 'e this longful time."

"I was passing and had a mind to come in and see you——"

"An' the cab'net—say it out. You knaw that's wheer your thoughts was—'pon the li'l cab'net my husband gived me, what he bought to the Brixham sale. You've broke the last commandment oft enough awver that now, haven't 'e?"

"I have," he admitted, and his eyes rested on the little piece of Sheraton furniture with the enthusiasm of the amateur. "I do want it, and you know there's a ten-pound note waiting for you, Thomasin, when you like to put out your hand for it. What's the value of it to you? A stout cupboard would answer your purpose as well."

"No, no; almost the last thing 'tis as ever my man gived me. Must keep it; but won't be much longer. Then, when my sticks be sold for Sib—for young folks allus want new things—you 'll be able to pick it up for a sovereign, I daresay."

"Don't talk about that. You 're good for years, and I hope, seeing you 'll not part with it, that I shall have to wait a very long time for the cabinet."

"Look here, Sir Archer," she said. "I 'll leave it to 'e under my will if you 'll tackle that auld fox-hunter, Baring, 'bout the bit o' ground I wants to bide in when I 'm buried. 'Tis a lew corner wheer the western light comes of an evenin', an' he won't promise me I may have it. It's just his ugly jealousy 'cause I give ear to Pastor Newte 'stead of him."

The Squire frowned. Newte and all his kind were evil things in the eyes of Sir Archer.

"You 're too old to be so silly," he said. "Come back to the church. You, a *quid nunc* at your time of life! Isn't the old Bible good enough for you?"

"Ess, my dear. An' Baring 's drove me out of St. John's for that very reason. Hell 's cold! Theer 's a flat atheist for 'e! So we 'm out—him an' me—'cause I left church right in the middle of his nonsense; an' the man will revenge himself an' bury me down-long wheer that trollop, Sally Vosper, be buried, an' wheer the children come through the hedge an' play knuckle-bones on they flat tombs. I knaw he will, if you don't exert your lawful authority."

"You 'll lie where all who have been true to the Baskervilles have laid—within our own portion of the churchyard," declared the knight. "And as for this cabinet, since you 're so determined, I must wait. But I will buy the thing when the time comes, and your pretty granddaughter shall not think I paid too little either."

"Pretty she is," admitted the old woman; "an',

what 's a delight to me, her eyes be real Baskerville blue. 'Tis most presumptuous in a Marldon maiden to have eyes that colour; yet hers be, an' her hadn't no choice in the matter, so you 've not got any call to blame her."

The Squire declared imitation to be a worthy form of flattery.

"Yet," he said, "'tis a rare shade, and I must look at Sibella closer when next we meet. That she was the prettiest young woman in Lower Marldon I knew."

"An' the daps o' me at her age," said Gammer Hatherley; "but that was afore your time. I 'd turned forty afore you looked at a female understandingly."

"I remember you comely enough all the same," declared Sir Archer. "Your generation was made of better stuff than the present one. You old Marldon women wear so well."

"We 'm gude all through—so healthy an' sound an' sweet as the red airth we 'm sprung from," said Mrs. Hatherley. "Women an' apples was allus the pride o' Lower Marldon. Range your thought awver the place an' you 'll see how true 'tis. If you 'd

drink the cider squeezed out o' your own soil instead o' trashy furrin grape wine, as curdles in a English belly, like their lingo on a English ear, you 'd be more English in your way of thinkin', no doubt."

"I 'm counted too English already by those who don't fear to tell me their minds," he said. "But I 'll ponder your advice, Thomasin."

"Do," she answered. "You may laugh at auld cider an' auld women, but both do more gude than harm in the world, mostly 'cause they 've gathered up the fat of age an' the wisdom of time, an' Nature works to mellowness in 'em. That is if they comes o' gude stock an' ban't ower-ripe."

Sibella entered at this moment, curtsied to the Squire, and was about to disappear when he stopped her.

"Let me look into your eyes, my dear," he begged. "What a blush! Baskerville blue sure enough! Your mother was obviously an Englishwoman, Sibella. You have that great cause of satisfaction. You may thank God that, though your father roamed the earth, he knew it behoved him to marry one of his own race."

He patted her on the head, bid Mrs. Hatherley "good-morning," and soon trotted away, baffled of the cabinet, yet in no ill humour; for his ancient nurse always served to soothe the man's natural acerbity and appeal to his scanty sense of humour.

As for the Sheraton cabinet, it was only a question of time.

CHAPTER V.

AN AFFAIR OF THE CONSCIENCE.

MR. ALPHEUS NEWTE was sorely troubled, for he had surprised Providence on the very brink of an indiscreet action, and it grew daily a more difficult question to decide whether he should frustrate Providence or permit matters to take their course. As a preliminary step he had agreed to Farmer Cloberry's proposal and entered upon Sunday duty in the farm-building at Upper Marldon. This business anchored him in the neighbourhood. Indeed he had taken two rooms at a cottage near Compton Castle, and his visits to that ancient pile were frequent enough to satisfy even Gammer Hatherley.

The matter troubling Mr. Newte was financial, and represented by Bank of England notes to the value of a thousand pounds. He alone of men was aware that this sum reposed in the old cabinet; and only one woman also knew the fact. The heart

of Alpheus grew warm when he thought of the delight of the orphan girl; it grew cold again when he considered the grave dangers that possession of such a sum must mean for Sibella. It was at this point in his cogitations that he questioned the workings of Providence. Money, though the root of all evil, must, like certain other dangerous roots, be allowed a mighty power for good in skilled hands. To the untutored mind of Sibella Hatherley a thousand pounds would come merely as an idea. She might no more grasp such a figure than understand the meaning of the miles between earth and sun. Alpheus Newte, on the contrary, from his half-century of experience, was able very accurately to gauge the significance of four figures. He knew how much good it would be possible to do with the money; and also how much it should be expected to fetch, set out at interest. He understood how difficult it was to acquire a thousand pounds, and he realised keenly all the temptations that such a sum might be expected to offer to an uncultured maiden. In his mind's eye he saw adventurers without shame or scruple seeking for the hand of Sibella, and he feared that possession

of this fortune was only too likely to come between her and an honest man's love. He took the matter very seriously to heart, being a conscientious soul where responsibility was concerned. Finally he determined to put Sibella's sagacity to the proof. So much must depend upon that in the future. It was his earnest ambition to stand between her and the world—to be something more than a mere friend. This he desired solely for love of her old grandmother. There was a course open the which, if pursued, would enable Mrs. Hatherley to close her eyes in peace. It involved some sacrifice upon the part of Alpheus, but he was not the man to shrink from the path of duty. The sequel rested with old Thomasin's granddaughter; so Mr. Newte determined to approach her and satisfy himself whether her intellect was equal to the unassisted control of a thousand pounds.

"She'm somewheers in the castle, no doubt," said Mrs. Hatherley, when her friend enquired concerning the girl, after a pleasant hour with the Bible on a long evening in July. "You'll find her if you look around. An' I'm sure I wish, 'stead of tempting her with your trinkets, you'd try an'

get her into a more sober way o' thought. She 'm light-minded even for her age."

Mr. Newte departed to roam the ruin. The prospect of discovering Sibella alone in some secluded chamber of the old castle was good to him, and among the many hidden holes and corners he pictured her, perhaps sitting at some moonlit window, whose brow was fringed with ragged ivy; perhaps wandering in the green court-yard, or dreaming alone under the hushed orchards without the castle walls.

But it was at the chapel he found her, and in no pensive mood as it seemed. He passed out of the great main apartment by a door that opened into the old oratory of the Gilberts, and as he did so, Sib entered briskly by another way. Indeed she came light-footed down a ladder which led to the priest's chamber above—a room whose ceiling had vanished, and which was now only shut in by slates of the main roof. For convenience of sight-seers the ladder stood, and other mode of ingress to the ruined apartment there was none.

Sibella, expecting another visitor, felt glad that her emotions did not appear in the gloom. Only

bars of silver stretched across the little chapel and touched a rough wooden form that extended under the eastern window, where once an altar stood.

"Sit down, my child," said Mr. Newte. "I came to seek you; the time and place are fitting. An odour of sanctity still hangs about these mouldering walls—or should do so. A very beautiful spot, fit for whisperings of lovers, and with only the moon to see us."

But to be alone with Mr. Newte in moonlight was not agreeable to Sibella. She did not like the man over-much, and just now quite a new note in his voice struck disagreeably upon her ear. There was an oily softness about it; and he patted her arm as he spoke—a liberty that she resented.

"What d'you want?" she asked, sharply. "Be quick, because I've—I've got an appointment."

As a matter of fact Sibella had been peeping from a ruined window in the priest's chamber for Dick Gilbert when Alpheus interrupted her; and she had supposed that it was Richard below when she twinkled so quickly down the ladder.

"I want to talk. I want to tell you something

of very great importance. It concerns your welfare in this world as well as the next, Sibella."

"Never mind about the next," said she. "They call you 'Pastor Newte' now, but I never shall. You're Johnny Fortnight to me always, because I like laughing better than long faces."

"And quite right too. If a maid doesn't laugh at eighteen, when shall she? Johnny Fortnight I'll be to little Sibella Hatherley. You know I'm twins — twins rolled up in one skin. Two fairly good men, as men go, but different. You pay your money and you take your choice."

Here, by some curious association of ideas, the pastor thought of Sibella's thousand pounds.

"Then I'd have you, Johnny Fortnight."

"So you shall, my pretty. Let me be your Johnny for ever and a day. Hale and hearty and sound as a nut, and not an hour more than forty-three. You little blue-eyed flower! I can't keep it in a minute longer. I love you with all my soul; have ever since you went into long frocks. And you 've a warm corner in your heart for me. Don't say 'No!' I'm not blind. Yet I couldn't believe

my eyes either, to think the most beautiful girl in Devonshire, or anywhere, felt kind to me. Yes, and the wisest girl, too. Such brains under that golden mop of hair! You stare—you stare and sigh as if all the ghosts of all the Gilberts were coming down the chimney."

But it was for a flesh-and-blood Gilbert that Sibella sighed. This abrupt, outrageous proposal from the pedlar did not even flatter her. First she felt very angry, then somewhat alarmed. Such cool appropriation took her breath away.

"It has come as a shock to you: you never looked so high, dear girl. Yet, here has Johnny Fortnight been pining and whining, and waking o' nights, and weaving rhymes to your shadow for months. Why did I come here, d'you think? Why did I undertake these pastoral duties at Upper Marldon, and accept a dwelling-place within two hundred yards of the castle? Need I tell you, my life? You've made me a proud man to-night. You've put a new soul into me. Not a word! The moonlight shows me all that I want to see. Kiss your Johnny!"

But the moonlight showed something more than

Sibella's shrinking form as the pastor advanced to caress her.

There was a hagioscope in one corner of the chapel, a squint, through which pious eyes in the old time had witnessed the elevation of the Host before the altar. Now a long shining tube protruded through it, and Mr. Newte, familiar with most common objects, knew the apparition for a gun-barrel. Sibella darted away to the door; her lover sat where once the altar stood. Moonlight was on his round face and the gun-barrel in a line with his round stomach.

"Move a yard, Johnny Fortnight, and I'll fire at your fat legs," cried Dick, through the hagioscope.

"It is the voice of Richard Gilbert," said Mr. Newte, with considerable self-control. "I shall be interested to know what Richard Gilbert is doing in these ancestral halls after 10.30 p.m.? And gun in hand, too."

"That's my business. Lucky I was here, anyway. Go in, Sib; I'll settle with him."

Sibella fled, and Mr. Newte kept his eye on the gun-barrel.

"You're doing a dangerous thing, young man," he said.

"And you a worse. *You!* An old jackdaw like you to dare to ask her that."

"A man is as old as he feels, Richard. I have yet to know by what right you presume to——. However, we won't argue. Kindly take that weapon off my person, or it will be much the worse for you."

"There's more in this than I can see," said Dick in high anger. "You're up to some rascality. And calmly to tell her she loved you! I'd have forgiven all the rest. How the deuce could a girl like Sibella love a bag of lard?"

"This isn't the time or place for riddles," answered Johnny Fortnight. "If the constable on his rounds hears you—as well he may—you will soon find yourself in a very painful position. Now move that gun, or, I repeat, it will be the worse for you."

"Don't threaten me, you old fool! Say a word against me and you'll be ruined yourself—you and your barn at Upper Marldon and all your humbug!"

"On the contrary, Richard. You are powerless. You can only say that you overheard me offer a proposal of marriage. There is neither disgrace nor ignominy attaching to a proposal of marriage. But just consider what I can say. Here I sit with your gun-barrel pointing at my vitals. You have threatened murder; you have broken into Compton Castle by night; you have compromised Sibella Hatherley shamefully; you have——"

"That's enough," said Richard, "I see how it is. You're dangerous. I can't let you be at large till I think about this. Is your word worth anything? I suppose not."

"Nothing to you, Richard, for I shouldn't give it. At last you see now what a fool's trick you have played. That's a blessing perhaps. Now remove that gun and let me go. You'd better come with me. As to the future, that's for me to decide, not you."

"I don't know," retorted Dick. "Till to-morrow I'll decide it anyway. A chap like you is safer in a cage. To dare to say Sibella loved you! Why didn't you offer marriage to her grandmother? No; until to-morrow I'll have you hard and fast, unless

you 'll stand a charge of bird-shot in your legs. Get up that ladder, Johnny!"

"Never!"

"Get up, or I 'll drag you up like a sack of coals. You know I can."

The pastor made a dart for the main door by which Sibella had retreated; but young Gilbert was too quick for him. They met at the exit, and in five minutes poor Alpheus Newte was up the ladder, in that haunt of bats and spiders known as the priest's chamber.

"There you can bide till morning," said Richard. "I 'll be here by five o'clock or earlier; then we 'll make a bargain. You can shout if you like, but nobody will hear you; and if they do they 'll only think it 's an owl that 's eaten too many mice."

He removed the ladder and Mr. Newte was a prisoner.

"One moment before you go," urged the pastor. "It is never wise for a boy to make an enemy of a man, and——"

"I 'm not a boy."

"Well, think twice before you leave me here.

Honestly, it won't pay you to do so. If Sibella loves me——"

"Don't say it!" roared the other—"or if you must say it, say it to night-birds and beetles. 'Loves you!' Loves the devil!"

"Finally, I may mention that I came here without supper," said Mr. Newte. "You don't propose to add starvation to my other discomforts, do you? If so, that will be the last straw. I can forgive most things, but not deliberate physical cruelty."

"Starving a bit will cool you down and make you ashamed."

Without more words Gilbert picked up his gun and retreated as he had come, through the orchards. He did not seek his sweetheart. He was in a flame with all things, and even indignant with her that she should for one instant have listened to Mr. Newte.

"She ought to have screamed out loud enough to wake the dead the moment such a worm as that said the word 'love' to her," he thought, with a panting breast.

Dick did not sleep until dawn already glimmered

over the high lands east of Orchard Farm. Then he slumbered heavily, and only woke at six. Instantly he repaired to Compton. But on entering the chapel, now alive with choral service of birds, he found that the ladder was in its place and his prisoner had fled.

As a matter of fact, it may be recorded that Alpheus spent no miserable vigil in the ruin,—for upon Richard's stormy departure, Sibella had returned to the chapel and righted the wrong done.

Mr. Newte's eloquence speedily prevailed with her. He painted the dreadful danger that young Gilbert ran, yet he agreed to all her stipulations; he promised to take no step against his foe if she restored him his liberty; and he solemnly swore that he would never propose marriage to Sibella again as long as he lived.

"You can't be two men at once," she told him quite seriously. "I was wrong. You must give up being Johnny Fortnight for evermore if it makes you so silly. You're Pastor Newte now. I never heard anything so horrid as your proposal to me. You meant it kindly, but it

was horrid; though, of course, I'm very much obliged to you. And you'll promise not to do any hurt to Dick, or say you met him here—on your honour?"

"If I cannot save your person—by which I mean marry you, Sibella," he returned loftily, from his seat above her in the shattered doorway of the priest's chamber,—"I will save your soul. Yes, that I may still do. You've no sense of humour, or you would laugh to see me here, imprisoned where monkish rascals brewed their devilries in the old days by night while the castle slept. Consider how my Protestant spirit chafes at being caged up in this popish ruin. However, your soul must be saved. Put the ladder in its place, there's a good girl. May the Lord guide my steps down, so that they slip not. I was twenty-five years of age when I offered you marriage just now; I'm sixty at this moment. Such changes may a single tragic hour bring. You've disappointed me. I'll say no more. I had a private reason for making trial of your intelligence. Can you not see that a boy who points guns at people without provocation must be an utter failure as a husband? But, of course

you can't. Words are absolutely thrown away at a moment like this. Get the ladder, and let me go home—with a sore heart and a bad cold."

She obeyed, and the pastor departed to his cottage. He was far less angry than might have been supposed, and made an excellent supper before retiring.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART.

TEN days later Sibella and Richard met by appointment in a deep, ivy-hung lane above Orchard Farm; and from thence they climbed together upwards where the great hills billowed above the village. It was the time when orchard trees are busy between the pageants of spring and autumn. Under miles of sober green, young fruit was swelling, and only Nature and the farmer knew how matters progressed. Hay had been garnered; a warm tint already touched the corn; while, scattered amidst pasture and crops, many an acre stretched its naked bosom to the sun and awaited seed. Daily the ploughed lands grew of a paler tint as their moisture dried.

Half-way to his destination at hilltop, Gilbert met a dark figure and knew it for Johnny Fortnight. This day his secular duties called Mr. Newte, for the Bethel at Upper Marldon, albeit in a condition

very thriving, by no means represented a settled income for its pastor as yet. However, the reformer had already enjoyed one stormy interview with the vicar of the parish; and this, rightly, he deemed a sign of progress.

"Well met," said the worthy man, and he beamed upon Dick and Sibella as though incidents of a recent night were already lost to memory. "So you are taking God's good sunshine together. You are both a lesson to all of us to share the blessings of this world, each with his neighbour. And what greater blessing than a pretty girl? I see by your faces that you have not quite forgotten an evening now buried in the past. But let me beg of you to do so. I have, myself. Only the petty mind finds room for matters inconvenient. You must forget, and I will forgive. Bless you both; and let the spirit in which I take my great disappointment be a sermon to you. I meant well. My heart has a way of going out to the young and the beautiful and the unprotected. I did not understand that you were so much to one another, or I should not have spoken. There—the greatness of it! Fancy a man of my age condescending to explain his

actions to two children. You're both fatherless, by the will of God. Then I'll be your father. Kiss me, Sibella—as a daughter. I insist."

Before she could draw back he had kissed her on the mouth in his fatherly way. Richard, puzzled and ill at ease, clenched his fist, but stood helpless under the other's oily tongue.

"Go your ways to the song of the birds. 'In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.' And at other times also; in fact, all the year round. Next Sunday let me see you both at the Gospel Nest, my little house of prayer. You shall hear things set out in an allegory that will do your hearts good. And that reminds me——"

He opened his basket and showed a brooch, a little true-lovers' knot of blue enamel.

"Surely that seems indicated? You were going to the Windmill. Don't get so red, Richard. Why shouldn't you go? There, under heaven, with nothing between you and your Maker on His Throne, you designed to ask this maiden to be your wife. And why not? You think I'm a wizard. Go along with you both! Here's the brooch.

Matches her eyes—such forget-me-not eyes as they are. She wouldn't hear love from me, bless her! Yet I had some pretty things to say; but 'tisn't the things they care for, only the voice that says 'em. Five shillings—not another penny. So the brooch is half a gift from you and half from me."

He shouldered his basket, and was gone in a shower of words. The little blue brooch lay in Dick's hand, and his two half-crowns were in Mr. Newte's pocket.

"The man's made of quicksilver. How can anybody take him seriously?" grumbled young Gilbert.

"I think he means well, if he's not mad," declared Sibella.

"He's not mad. Fancy knowing I was going to take you to Windmill Hill!"

She blushed and looked down.

"I'm sure I didn't know it, or else——"

"You wouldn't have come? Don't say that, Sib."

The place alluded to had some special fame in this neighbourhood. Upon its summit stood the stump of an ancient mill, and here, according to

tradition, the question of questions was put, generation after generation, by the men of Marldon to the maids. To propose marriage save beneath the crest of this round ruin was to court a frosty answer.

"Then we need not go further," continued Richard. "D'you want to turn, Sibella?"

Such an unfair question took poor Sib's breath away. Her cheeks deepened to the colour of an eglantine's petals. Here, by this abrupt route, was she faced with necessity of an implicit "Yes" or "No." She felt it unfair, almost dishonest, certainly not worthy of Richard.

"I 'm going to see the view from Windmill Hill," she said, "though I can see it very well without you."

"But I can't see it without you, Sib. You 'll let me come at least?"

He caught one string of her sun-bonnet and stayed her progress. Then she held out her little hand to him, and he made a sound of joy and walked beside her. Any formal proposal of marriage under the circumstances seemed more than necessary; yet to both there was a sort of joy in knowing beforehand the object of their

little pilgrimage. Sib's heart beat hard under her round bosom, and a mist was in her eyes. Dick's voice grew unsteady; he gasped once or twice, then kept silence.

Together they climbed the hill, then sat down where a crumbling cone of stone stood at the top —sat down with their faces turned to their homes beneath.

A great shoulder of the grass-lands concealed the village, where it lay far below, and swept in vast and regular undulations worn out by waters that rolled and retreated hence before the birth of man. A deep valley stretched beneath, and the slopes on either side were fertile under a mosaic of many-coloured fields, fringed with great elms; bounded by lanes and hedges. Farm-houses dotted the expanse, while concourse of shining stacks stood about the homesteads and in the corners of meadows. All harmonies of green and blue-green, silver of shorn grasses, and pale gold of ripening grain, were spread forth in a network of triangles and squares and patterns of every irregular figure imaginable. Unnumbered orchards filled the valleys with sober summer green; and

they were set against red earth or the brightness of whitewashed cots; while beyond this immediate field of view, separated therefrom by gentle hill-crests and great woodlands, dale upon dale of similar character extended and faded with diminishing perspective into the hazes of noon. Distance modified the abrupt changes of colour under the various cultivation, and the soft south wind, moist with long kissing of the sea, swept all and brought great hazes, dewy and opaline, that washed the world with liquid light. Nature painted with sunshine, with cloud-shadow, with her proper jewels melted in the crucible of space; and the foreground of this huge picture, though it seemed to sleep and smile, was in truth a battlefield—a chess-board whose squares were meadow and orchard, forest and fallow, and upon which five-score busy farmers were playing the game of life. Beyond, to the dappled sky, there rolled upward a world apart, raised to the clouds, stretching gigantically along to its southern boundaries by Brent Hill and Eastern Beacon, and breaking into stony peaks and precipices where Hey Tor towered with Rippon Tor and

the round stone-capped beacon of Buckland. Like a veil lifted against and drawn along the sky the vast, dim hills of Dartmoor rose, and shadowy in the dips between still other tors ascended above wildernesses of heath and stone and cradles of many rivers in the central waste. Here and there, upon the nearer distance, sun-flashes told of glass; here and there some hill or tumulus fledged with forest appeared against background of scattered smoke; while the cloud shadows drifted slowly over them, and the wind blew gently as befitted a scene so placid to the eye. The grass on the ruin waved; the harvest about its base swayed and rippled over the steep hill. The corn-tops were a golden green against the darker stems and foliage. They whispered and rubbed delicately together, and made the hushed music of waters flowing far away; they bent in unison, and, as floods of colourless light swept over their heads, the scarlet of poppies appeared, with the lavender of gipsy roses and the golden eye of a corn-chrysanthemum; even as waves ebbing about an ocean-facing rock reveal the brightness of submerged weeds at every throb.

Here, upon this eminence, braced by winds from sea or moor, the youngsters of the parishes around found courage to put the question of fate; here, under the air and sunshine or within the shelter of the ruin, many a good man had been lifted up to bliss or cast into temporary perdition. Upon the rotting inner rind of the mill, where plaster still survived in patches on the conglomerate of which the tower was built, countless initials, scratched or written, told of happy lovers. Now, peaceful, silent, and usually deserted, the place gave rest to the sparrow-hawk and lonely crow by day, and reflected the moonbeams by night. Flowers picked there — pimpernels, wild geraniums, campions — still reposed, hidden within the pages of old prayer-books by maidens, now mothers. There was not a girl wife-old who could think of the wind-mill without quickening of heart-beat; scarcely a Marldon woman who might recall the spot without a smile or a sigh. There the great west wind had toiled full many a year to make man's bread; now its labours were ended, and it dawdled on the hill-top to listen to the ancient, eternal vows of love.

Aloft the lark still sang and the breezes bent the corn. Upon the hedge-bank blackberries already grew red, and the black seedpods of broom cracked crisply; then, after discharging their harvest, twisted themselves into corkscrews.

All these matters, and many beyond power of telling or seeing, were mirrored in two pairs of eyes; but the thoughts of boy and girl had no present concern with hills and valleys or the habitations of men. Richard thought of a thing then invisible to him—the church tower, where it rose in a cluster of roofs that marked Higher Marldon. He remembered his father sleeping there, and wondered whether it would be seemly that he should wed his joy so near that sacred dust. He had a fear that to be married within a few yards of his parent's grave—that there to take the whole glory of life, in shape of Sibella, might argue lack of respect. Upon that theme he determined to consult his mother. Then another thought found tongue and he spoke.

"Dear heart," he said, "I'd hoped so much to have a sort of right in your welfare, to have a little of it rested with me. You know

there's a secret matter that your grandmother keeps hidden from everybody. Father knew of it; she trusted him like the rest of the world trusted him; but though he wanted me to hear the matter when he died, and to take the care of it off Mrs. Hatherley's shoulders, she wouldn't hear of any such thing. I was too young and green she said! Perhaps she was right."

"Never was a wiser man than you, I'm sure, Richard."

"No, no; 'tis a terrible drop from my father to me. I see that in my mother's eyes. Still your secret—so to call it—or your grandmother's secret about you—it is in somebody's keeping. That much she told me; but wouldn't name no names. Mr. Joshua Hatherley, perhaps—her brother. Yet it seems strange that he—a mere labourer at Orchard Farm—should be trusted with what I, the master of the place, may not hear."

"Great-uncle Joshua doesn't know anything. You may be sure of that. There's small love lost between him and granny. The old man drinks, you know. He's a little bit sour because

he's lived so long in the world and never got more than two shillings a day. And soon he'll get less, so he says; that is when he grows too old to do a man's work. That haunts him and makes him drink more than ever. Yet, poor old dear, I've known him quite kind now and again. 'Tis a shame to call him 'Crab' Hatherley as all people do."

"You can tell him that he shall never have less than he gets now if you like. But you—you, Sibella. You know all that's in me to say. My fingers have pressed it into your dear little hands, and my eyes have told it into yours. Haven't they? I know they have, for yours have answered them. I've said it every way but with my tongue; and with that too—when you were not there to hear. You're the whole world to me, Sib. Nothing matters but you. Could you marry me some day? Oh, do say you could! I'll be the best husband I can. I'm not much of a chap, but such as I am——"

"You're the best, dearest, handsomest man—— Oh, whatever am I saying?"

"Not the truth; but I love to hear you say it,

all the same. God bless my lass, and make me good enough for her; and—and——"

His arms were round her where they sat together. He forget his strength until she cried out to him:

"Dick! Dick! Don't! You're squeezing me to death, and all the birds see us. I'll never be able to listen to a lark again without blushing."

Richard laughed.

"Hark at him! He's got a wife down in the grass. He knows. He can tell all he feels to her. He can make her little heart glad where she sits on the nest. If I could talk like he sings, then I'd make you love me."

"You know right well I do love you. Hug me again, softly. Oh, Dick, to think that in all this great world you—you were sent to me! Just the only, only man of all."

"And Mr. Newte was sent."

"Never! He came."

"Sent about his business. I feel I ought to thrash him now, whenever I think of it. How he dared!"

"You dared; how thankful I am you did."

"I'm different—not worthy of you, sweetheart;

but a solid man, anyway, with a farm. All *his* fortune's on his back."

"And on his tongue. But why should he have wanted to marry me?—why should anybody, for that matter?"

"Everybody in the world might. That's what makes me lost with wonder to think I've got you."

A bell tolled from Marldon, and the sound reached them faintly.

"When will they ring for us, Sib? When will you marry me, my pretty?"

"Oh, I can't think, Dick—ages hence! There's granny; I won't leave her while she lives. You must wait. Why, I'm only eighteen, and you—how old?—twenty-eight, or some such absurd age."

Richard made a face.

"We'll see about that," he said. "Sibella Hatherley and Richard Gilbert will be asked out in church this year, or I'm no prophet."

"You must listen to your mother—she's so wise."

"She is wise—as wise in silence as words. I

must tell her of this great news. Where did that Newte kiss you, Sib? Why the deuce didn't I smash him? One thing I swear: I'll never kiss you on the same spot—never."

"You have, sweetheart."

"Then he kissed your lips—your very lips!"

"Forgive him; he's so silly and funny."

"A kiss from you and five shillings from me."

"Where's the brooch? Mayn't I have it? or was it for somebody else?"

"Sib! how can you, at a moment like this?"

He fastened the trinket to her collar, kissed her again, felt his hands full of her soft, bright hair; then turned away from her for a moment and lay prone with his face on the grass. The greatest, purest joy that he had known warmed his being, and the heart of him beat out a wordless praise to the Maker of the round earth for this abundant bliss. He felt his cup of happiness was brimming; for love of Sib he loved all other things, to the least small insect creeping on the turf. He echoed the joy of the summer noon, moved his weight from a daisy for the girl's sake, turned, smiled up at the sun in heaven, felt the glory of the light and the glory of

his joy, like one tide of great blended rivers surging over his soul and drowning him in ecstasy. He could not live long away from the touch of her; so he stretched out his hand, and she saw it without turning and clasped it. Then she sat, as before, silent, with the blue distance in her blue eyes, her face very calm and placid, clothed in soft contentment, her lips upon the brink of smiling, her dimples waiting to laugh into life.

The great moment passed. Then Richard arose, lifted his lady to her feet, and, going by a field-path, walked beside her over the broad hills to the valley below.

At Orchard Farm he left her, and soon stood before his mother, where she passed alone under the apple-trees—a tall, grey-eyed woman in the soft autumn-time of great beauty now passing away. With a sort of stateliness she moved slowly beneath the long avenues. Sometimes she stopped to scan a tree. They were all known to her, with their histories and their virtues. A gentle satisfaction filled her face at sight of patriarchs who had done their part nobly for twenty years, and the young trees in youthful pride of their first fruits pleased

her no less. To Mary Gilbert the orchard was a home of memories and human interests knit up with the springtime of her life. In that place the old trees had been planted by her husband, the saplings by her son. There was the 'quarrender' she herself had set in its place upon the day of her home-coming as a bride; there was the brown russet, now a stout tree, that his father had planted the day after Richard's birth. Her husband it was who had planned these rows of grey stems; his eyes had seen the flowers that went before the present harvest. It did honour to him and promised bravely. To the woman these cool glades of green had always been the first joy of the farm. Others worked in the dairy or the great herb-garden, where peas and gooseberries came as early as anywhere upon the country-side; but her special care and pride through a quarter of a century had been the orchard. It was the home of her gladness and sorrow. The trees had watched her mother-joy with Richard at her breast; they had seen her grief when her daughter died; their vanished splendour of Spring had felt her tears—a rain from her heart known only to those bygone petals on a bygone night.

"Mother," said Dick,—"Mother, I've been to Windmill Hill with Sib!"

She nodded and looked at her son with a strange expression; then she smiled, and held out her hands to him.

"Oh, mother dear! say you're content."

She strained one arm round him and so remained, with her cheek against his, gazing forward into time. She did not see the new mistress at Orchard Farm; she did not note her own power waning and the old order changing under the young rule. These thoughts, had they risen, must have left her mind unclouded. She only felt the first pang when a son's heart is riven and the woman has dawned who henceforth will probably have the larger part of it.

"God give you joy of the maid, Richard, and bless you and her, my son," she said slowly. "Go in now and eat your meat, and leave me here to think."

He kissed her and went to the house; then she lifted her voice and called him gently back. He returned and looked into her eyes. They were eyes that he understood, for they spoke oftener to him

than her tongue. Now their dumb question went to his heart and made it almost sad.

"Dear, dear mother, you're frighted for me, that I'll change—change to you! Oh, don't you know me better? You do in your heart. Your heart's not afraid. Sib loves you only less than I do."

Then he left her, and she, moving again till he was out of sight, presently sat down and scanned a spot where an ancient tree, though blown flat, still responded to Nature's call, and with each twig upturned to the sun made brave show of fruit.

"Here shall the girl plant on the day of her home-coming, if it chances at the right season of the year," she thought. "Here her own sapling shall stand betwixt old, wise bearers that have seen the whole life of the orchard, and knew Dick's father when he was a lad. So the young thing will arise in good company."

She nodded to herself at this reflection. It was her manner of thought to impart a sort of personality to the apple-trees, and she felt their moods a little. Their spring delights were known to her; their summer cares she shared; she moved, like Pomorum Patrona herself, amid the red and gold

of autumn; and in winter-time surveyed with understanding the misty traceries of grey and crooked boughs. Their shadows on the snow wrote messages to her; she had entered into their mute being at time of tempests; had seen the lightning paint their shapes; had witnessed them through nightly silences, and gazed upon them 'branch-charmed by the earnest stars.'

CHAPTER VII.

OLD THOMASIN PASSES.

THE indignation of Sir Archer Baskerville, when he heard one morning that the man familiarly known as Johnny Fortnight had dared to call upon him, was very considerable. At first he suspected the pedlar proposed to barter; but this was not so. In his capacity of religious leader, Mr. Newte now approached the lord of the land. This, as it happened, was unfortunate, for already Parson Baring had laid his grievances at the Squire's feet, and the problem of ousting Mr. Newte from Farmer Cloberry's barn happened to be in the knight's mind when Alpheus called upon him.

Entering from his garden, he found the visitor with his eyes roaming over well-filled bookshelves. Mr. Newte did not offer to shake hands. He knew better than that, and merely bowed with a show of the greatest deference.

"What d'you want?" asked the Squire gruffly.

"Two minutes of your valuable time, Sir Archer. You have but to say 'Do this,' and it is done. There's a refreshing smack of feudal days about the Marldons. That is what attracted me to them. This cant concerning liberty I preach against every Sunday. No man is free, not even the Lord's anointed, as you are doubtless aware, Sir Archer. In the Second Book of Kings we——"

"I don't want you to preach here, sir. What's your business? Come to it, please."

"Briefly, then, one of my parishioners——"

"*Your* parishioners!" thundered out the Squire. "Who the devil! What the deuce! *Your* parishioners! How dare you stand here—how *dare* you stand here and talk about your parishioners? You've insulted the clergyman of the parish and apparently reduced the man to mere indignant pulp, because he's only got a sportsman's brains and can't live with your oily tongue. But you shall not do the same with me, that I promise you. You're a rogue and a vagabond. I'd have you whipped out of the parish if I could."

"I love a man of fire," said Mr. Newte, rubbing

his hands gently. "My soul goes out to a scholar who can handle his own language in this way. You're worth fifty thousand of your parson. Since you resent the word, I'm sorry I used it. What I should have said is, that an ancient woman not unknown to you—one, indeed, who was privileged in her time of sap and fruition——"

"For God's sake, be short! I hate talk. Tell me what you want, and go. I don't like to think that you have been in my house."

"This manly frankness makes it impossible for me to be angry. You're one of the grand old school, Sir Archer. Such men have made this country what it is. Would to God—I say it reverently—that our politicians would speak to France and to Russia as you speak to me. Well, it is dear old Gammer Hatherley, of Compton Castle. A good woman—a woman who has justified her existence by giving her breast to your infant lips. A very picturesque, dear, worthy, and Bible-reading woman. Your wet-nurse, in fact, to say it with all respect."

"What about her? D'you think her interests are not safe enough with me?"

"Undoubtedly; but the sun rolling in space will overlook a humble flower of the field unless the blossom does something for itself, and thrusts forward its head to win the beneficent beam. In fact, we must catch Providence on the hop in this weary world, Sir Archer. Gammer has not your ear; yet injustice is being done and her last days embittered. She desires to lie in a certain spot of the churchyard. It has been her ambition ever since I knew her. Surely a lowly ambition. Yet the Reverend Baring will not promise. On the other side of the graveyard you may have observed that the village children, after their school hours, delight to play and trample over the dust of their forefathers. Also, a she-goat—the property of the vicar himself—bleats and browses there in a manner very painful to a pious mind. Mrs. Hatherley does not desire to be browsed and bleated over where she lies awaiting the Last Trump. And who shall blame her? Again, one Sarah Vosper lies next to the spot where our poor lady will probably be buried if you do not rise in your power to prevent it. Now this Sarah Vosper, during life, bore a reputation for large-heartedness and easy virtue very painful to

the ancient curator of Compton Castle. Thomasin Hatherley has a concrete mind in these matters and a simple faith in the Letter of the Word. To think of lying beside the late Mrs. Vosper, frankly, causes her the greatest uneasiness. She anticipates the resurrection of the body—of her body and Mrs. Vosper's—and cannot abide the thought that at a moment, when Heaven knows there will be plenty to do without making work, some thew or bone of Mrs. Vosper may by inadvertence be hurriedly inserted within her own risen and glorified frame. Now this is a very painful idea—especially when we picture Sarah in another place with some anatomical details pertaining to Mrs. Hatherley. One dare not shake the faith of the aged by making too light of such matters, though as men of the world——"

"Stop!" cried the Squire. "Never did I hear such a flux of words in my life! What the old woman wants I understand. I will mention the affair to Baring. There 's plenty of time."

"I doubt it, if I may differ. She 's ill as a matter of fact, and at ninety life's candle vanishes to a puff of air. A cold or chill is upon her, and

she has no power to take adequate nourishment. So the physician from Newton Abbot informed me yesterday. You might lengthen her days if you would promise her the place where the evening sunlight comes."

"Ill! Why wasn't I told? Hang the people! I never hear anything until afterwards. Now depart, if you please. I'll see you again about your own affairs. This barn of Cloberry's and you in it, drawing the Church of England folks away from their lawful place of worship, is all wrong and very unseemly. You will have to abandon your enterprise."

"It is a matter of conscience—and finance. My heart swells out to the community. Oh, the community! Did I mention that? I only ask for power to do the greatest good to the greatest number. Doubtless you are of the same mind. Indeed, your life, as the prop and pillar and strong tower of defence here, proves that you are. I will wait upon your leisure, Sir Archer. And Gammer Hatherley shall know that you are on her side. It may bring new life to her. Meantime, your servant to command."

Mr. Newte bowed as well as his ample form allowed of an obeisance and departed. He had spoken the truth, for the dame at Compton Castle was fast approaching her allotted span, and her interests and hopes as she daily waned away were centred about her last resting-place. She murmured her grievance to all who would listen; then, out of good-nature as much as any other reason, Johnny Fortnight brought the story again to the Squire's ears.

But Thomasin did not live to hear of her old master's promise. When Mr. Newte visited the Castle next morning he learned that Granny Hatherley was beyond all mundane interests.

There had fallen a great storm on Lower Marldon, and the old castle groaned to the thunder. At the height of the electric tempest, Sibella, who vainly tried to keep the intermittent dazzle of the lightning from her grandmother's chamber, noticed a marked change in the old woman. She much feared the riot and rage of the storm, writhed under it and moaned aloud.

"God's mercy, what a night for a poor body to go up-along!" she cried. "How's my auld

weak sawl to weather such a storm! The angels theerselves won't be able to hold wing up 'gainst the rain. No feathered thing could do it. Sib, come you here an' hold to my hand fast. I be gwaine—I be gwaine to die. My heart's stoppin'. An', mind—pastor knaws 'bout you. You ax un for what I 've left 'e."

The girl got brandy, then flew to waken her grandmother's brother who slept below. The storm had not shaken old Crab Hatherley's sleep, and he swore when his grand-niece finally roused him.

"What's the upstore for, you li'l fule? Be 'feared of thunder? Go along with 'e. Now I 'll not close eyes again till marnin', drabbit you."

"'Tis gran'mother—she 's going to die. She 's changed terribly. The storm is killing her."

"Her never could abide lightning."

"But she 's growing worse every moment. Pray run for the doctor, or it may be too late."

"She 've got to graw worse 'fore she graws better. 'Tis time her went, an' I ban't gwaine to traapse through a thunderstorm for she or any other body. She 've never been a gude sister to

me, an' haven't left me the price of a tobacco-pipe in her will, for she told me so. So you can go for doctor yourself if you 'm fule enough."

His voice was pitched high at his keyhole to outroar the thunder. Then Sibella heard him get back into bed; and, as the girl hastened to the sufferer, she caught one blinding glimpse of the flower-garden with shining threads of rain lashing down upon it, and all the colour sucked out of the flowers under a blue glare of lightning.

When she returned to Mrs. Hatherley's side Sibella found her grandmother unconscious; and so the old woman remained until the end. With the storm she passed in peace, and Crab Hatherley, appearing for a moment on his road to work next morning, found that his sister was dead, regarded her grimly, and then stumped off to tell the news. He was glad that she had gone at last. For a day or two at least her death would render him of passing interest and importance, and it must also represent a little extra drinking, because etiquette demands that bereaved persons should be offered free liquor.

For others beside her brother this departure of the dame represented events of great enduring

importance. To Richard Gilbert, now an engaged man, it meant probability of marriage at no distant date; to his sweetheart it opened a new life from almost every point of view, and also marked the end of her peaceful maidenhood in the old ruin; to Mr. Newte it awoke afresh the gravest possible problems. He was quite overweighted with the difficulties that Fate now cast upon him, and the destination of a parcel of Bank of England notes, representing one thousand pounds, caused him sleepless nights and anxious days. At one time he thought of escaping from conscience quickly and simply by the crude process of fulfilling his trust and handing the money to Sibella upon her grandparent's death To do this was the matter of a moment. He had but to take a little key from the inside of a yellow stoneware dog on the mantelpiece, unlock the old cabinet, and open the inner secret drawer.

But Mr. Newte was not a man to follow a simple and easy course if his duty seemed to indicate one more difficult. He was a remorseless casuist and great splitter of ethical straws. His soul, as he had told Sir Archer Baskerville, was in the habit of going out to the community; his motto was, "The greatest

good to the greatest number." Now he desired to know whether a thousand pounds in the hand of Sibella would be likely to prosper the common-weal and practically advance the well-being of others beyond herself. He much feared that this was improbable. The girl was doubtless selfish, and certainly ignorant of the power of money. She might misapply the bequest; in fact, the more Alpheus thought about it the more convinced was he that she would do so. He considered deeply with himself upon the subject, and he found that heaven seemed to expect another sacrifice on his part. To get any power over the money without first winning Sibella looked difficult, so long as Mr. Newte conducted himself upon conventional lines and proceeded honestly in the ordinary acceptation of that word. Therefore Alpheus felt that once again he must offer himself to the girl as her natural protector and support. He knew that she had accepted Richard Gilbert; he was aware that his case would be worse than hopeless; yet his conscience had to be satisfied. He accepted the earliest opportunity, and proposed to Sibella again upon the day before her grandmother was buried.

In this matter he showed no emotion until after her indignant refusal. Then he declared himself a man for whom life had but one road henceforth: the steep, strait pathway of well-doing.

"Come," he said, finding her alone,—"Come, my child, from this atmosphere of death into the good air. We will walk in the courtyard awhile, for I have something of importance to say to you."

Sibella, who very well remembered the last words that she had heard her grandmother utter, supposed that the man referred to the same matter, and therefore without hesitation walked beside him into the grass-grown quadrangle of the ruin.

"We'll sit here," she said, pointing to the great flight of stone steps that ascended through a little gate in the outer walls. The way led to old gardens beyond, where apple-trees flourished above raspberry-canes and gooseberry-bushes, and where the open spaces shone gay with opium poppies, stocks, roses, and other flowers in box-bound beds. The stairway rose by shallow steps whose every nook and cranny was full of seeding grasses, adorned with ripening wood-strawberries, or the home of little ferns.

"A very comfortable spot, embroidered by Nature's own wondrous hand," declared Mr. Newte. "Yet there is a hint of dampness which might induce rheumatism in the years to come. This article meets the case, however."

He took a sack which had held food for fowls, spread it, bid Sibella be seated, and then deposited himself as near to her as the dimensions of the sack made necessary.

"You will remember," he said, "certain painful incidents connected with yonder chapel. I was justly punished for presuming to address you within the precincts of a popish place of worship. Now, for reasons entirely creditable to me, and despite the fact that you think that you love the youth Dick Gilbert, I ask you again to be my wife instead of his. Don't blaze; this is a matter of conscience, and much may depend upon it."

Sibella sprang to her feet. Then she sat down once more beside the man to show how entirely she despised him.

"You were to be my father a few days ago, Johnny Fortnight; now you want to be my husband again — and no Dick with a shot-gun

anywhere nearer than Dartmouth. He 's there for the day."

"I was not ignorant of that. I desired to place this matter coolly and calmly before you."

"I 'm going to marry Richard in the autumn."

"He is very young and very hot-headed."

"He is the only man in the world."

"That, at least, is definite. I 'm sorry; I 'm bitterly sorry—not so much for myself as for the community. You don't understand that; but it doesn't matter. Yes, I 'm stricken, though it may not appear."

"You look as though you would get over it," declared Sibella.

"There is a despair that laughs," answered the pastor. "It is very horrid to hear. I feel like that; but I won't tear your heart or disturb this venerable ruin with any hyæna-like note of grief. I merely record that my emotions prompt me to utter such a sound. But they are under perfect control. These walls, that have witnessed the shapes of heroes and echoed their voices, shall not hear any unmanly howl from me. I assure you that these steps, which the feet of a Ralegh have trodden,

shall be wetted by no weak tear of mine. Depart in peace, Sibella, and be sure I shall never ask you again. I have to consider my self-respect and my duty to my neighbour; in fact, only the thought of generations yet unborn has torn this renewed declaration out of me. Personally, I cannot say I want you."

"Really, Mr. Newte," said Sibella, sharply, "it's only kind to suppose that you're mad. If you're sane, there's no excuse for you at all."

"Ah, but there is!" he answered, thinking of the thousand pounds. "How little you know—and how little you're likely to know," he added, half to himself. Then he shook his head, folded his hands over his round belly, and sighed.

Suddenly, to his great amazement, Sibella took up the thread of his secret thoughts.

"I believed you had something very different to tell me," she declared. "Instead of this nonsense, I expected something practical. D'you know what poor dear granny's last words to me were? I left her immediately after she had said them, and when I came back she was unconscious and never spoke again."

"Some expression of fervent faith, if I knew her aright."

"No—a kind thought for me. She had a secret and she trusted it to you. 'Pastor knows,' she whispered to me—dear, dear Granny—'you ask him for what I've left you!' That was what she said. Richard was going to ask you to explain after the funeral; but you won't mind telling me, as the question has suddenly risen to my mind, will you?"

It now became necessary for Alpheus to conclude with himself upon a definite course. He did not immediately answer, and Sibella spoke again:

"There is to be a little auction, as you know. Granny's few things are very old and not valuable. I wanted Great-uncle Joshua to have them; but she desired that they should all be sold. I'm afraid she didn't want great-uncle to have anything or any money; but I shall give him half of the little that is likely to come. For the rest, perhaps you can throw some light on my puzzle?"

Unconsciously Sibella had thrown some light upon Mr. Newte's. The great voice of the community was calling him. Must one girl, about to marry a rich

young man, stand between a thousand pounds and the hungry, thirsty, naked community? The pastor was still uncertain. He stood at the parting of the ways. Then he took the crooked road.

"I wish I knew what you were talking about. My conversation with the dear dead woman had very little to do with earth as a rule — save the narrow space she coveted at Upper Marldon. I was instrumental in winning that for her. She will lie in the red sunset light, far removed from the doubtful dust of Sarah Vosper. More I cannot tell you. She left you her blessing to my certain knowledge; and the blessing of a virtuous woman availeth much. But nothing tangible, so to say; no gold was ever mentioned, no coin of this realm—but the other, good measure pressed down and running over. As a matter of fact, old people have curious delusions. She may have dreamed, or seen a fortune in a vision. The wish was father to the thought, for she loved you dearly. Who doesn't?"

"You cannot help me then?"

"I wish I could. I'll ransack my memory—yet

it will probably be in vain. If I may speak, Sibella, I would remind you that money should be used as a weapon, not as an ornament. It brings obligations. The poor alone are really free."

"Yes, Mr. Newte. The point is, that dear Granny had money saved; her brother knows that much too. I wanted to look about, but Mr. Hatherley won't let me touch anything. He's arranged the sale with Mr. Michelmore, the auctioneer of Newton Abbot, and he's busy day and night, polishing up the furniture and china to make it fetch more money. Since I've promised him half of all the auction fetches he's been more unpleasant than ever to me, if that was possible."

"The world in a nutshell, Sibella. It takes a big pattern of mind to accept benefits without turning sour. Thank God, I have reached that sort of mind myself. I trumpet a benefit; I proclaim a benefaction from the housetops. No man who does me a good turn need fear my enmity, or doubt that he will have an excellent advertisement. Without vanity I can lay my hand upon my heart and say I practise as well as preach that rarest of Christian virtues, gratitude. To-day I am grateful even to

you, Sibella; you have done me good. Unconsciously you have pointed out my duty. The road to duty is often very uncertain; in fact, I always say that many more people would do their duty in this world if they only knew it. Mine now seems clear: you will not marry me; you prefer to go upon your own rash and unconsidered way. So be it. I have done what I could. My duty to you ceases, and I have to fall back upon my duty to the community. These things are a parable to you. And now farewell. We shall meet at the funeral, for, though he will try, Mr. Baring cannot refuse me permission to attend it."

He chattered himself out of her sight, and Sibella, thankful to be free, passed alone through the garden with her thoughts upon her lover.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOT NO. 39.

"D'YOU know anything of the old man, Mr. Joshua Hatherley?" enquired Richard of John Bridle upon the morning after Thomasin's funeral.

They walked together to inspect young turnips upon outlying land, and Gilbert, who was ill at ease, sought information.

Mr. Bridle stopped in his stride. He always desisted from any action when a question was addressed to him.

"Crab Hatherley's a poor item," he declared. "The man wouldn't eat a green apple for the belly-ache; but when you've said that, 'tis all you can say for him. A surly twoad of a chap. An' come pretty soon he won't earn his keep, for he's gettin' blamed stiff in the back an' so slow as Time about a job."

"You see, as he's a relation of my girl, I can't have him here doing common labourer's work any more."

"Ban't seemly, of coourse. Wouldn't be no lasting evil if us got rid of him altogether. He 'm comical-tempered, an' so ignorant as dirt. Can't write his name even. He haven't got brains enough to be anything but honest, but he 's so vicious as the last auld stallion us had and would do harm if he could. I 've seed un make faces like a monkey when he was vexed an' thought I wasn't lookin'."

Richard felt no astonishment at this harsh criticism, for what had happened recently confirmed it and tended much to trouble him. Crab Hatherley, in consideration of his loss and the necessity for winding up his sister's affairs, was allowed three days' holiday, and during that time he had been very busy in the mornings and very intoxicated after nightfall. An air of mystery and importance marked his manners, and he treated Sibella in a cruel, high-handed fashion that nothing could explain or excuse.

Her offers to aid his preparations for the auction were curtly declined. Crab insisted on doing everything himself. He polished the old china and brass; he made the warming-pan glitter like a star; he cleaned the picture-frames of the German prints,

and applied beeswax to the little Sheraton cupboard. But, with the exception of washing linen and anti-macassars, Sibella was allowed no hand in these preliminaries. Her great-uncle went on his way, and refused the girl so much as a sight of the old letters and other accumulations he rummaged from dusty drawers and a tarnished writing-desk, hidden for five-and-twenty years in a long box under Granny Hatherley's woollen graveclothes. These, with a board upon which her husband had been laid out, were used at her obsequies according to the dame's directions.

"I 've burned the lot of 'em," said Crab. "Rubbishy auld writings 'bout dead an' gone folks. They wouldn't do you no gude, an' maybe if you 'd read 'em they 'd awnly wake evil thoughts in you of them as be dust. All burnt an' nought for their labour but ashes. That shaws a man 's a fule to larn to write. Ashes will be the end of all he puts down."

"But, oh, this is terrible!" cried poor Sibella upon his startling news. "There 's a packet that belongs to me. It came home with me from my father when I was a baby. It will tell me all about

my mother, so granny fancied. You haven't burnt that, Great-uncle Joshua?"

"No," he said, "I haven't. I knaw wheer 'tis, but I can't get at it. Her kept that in the cabinet, an' the auld fule 'pears to have lost the key, for I can't find it nowheers. 'Tis theer, however, wi' her son's baaby socks an' other damn fulishness she kept in it. An' as I can't ope it, an' ban't gwaine to spoil the lock afore the auction, you 'd best to tell your young man—Dick Gilbert at Orchard Farm—to buy it when 'tis put up."

"Mr. Newte wants to buy it," said Sibella; "he's anxious to have a memento of dear grandmother."

The old man chuckled.

"So much the better then. Us'll see how far Johnny Fortnight's purse 'll take him on that road. Not far, I judge. They can bid each against t'other; an' when you've got the papers you 'll do wisely to burn 'em, for so like as not they 'll tell you more 'n you want to knaw."

"They 'll tell me all about my mother," she answered.

"An' that may be just what you 'd rather not hear. Doan't pretend you 'm so innocent. How if

she weern't married at all? 'Tis a way they've got in furrin paarts. You 'm wrong side the blanket so like as not. Then my gentleman to the farm, with his high, vain fancies of gude havage, wouldn't take 'e, not if you was made of solid gawld wi' diamond eyes!"

Crab laughed to see the girl go pale, then red.

"How dare you speak so of dead people?" she cried. "And of my own father! Oh, I wish I was a man, and as old as you are for a moment, then I'd thrash your wicked old bones till you screamed —I would."

He grinned at her rage, and grew amiable before the sight of so much indignation and grief.

"My advice is gude, for all your flutter. Doan't 'e read them papers if you want to keep your peace of mind. An' what 's more, doan't 'e let the chap read 'em. They say as the written word stands; but it caan't stand afore a coal fire."

Great fears came upon Sibella.

"Have you ever read them that you speak so?" she asked faintly. "I know you can read, Great-uncle Joshua, though you cannot write."

"I doan't say I have, an' I doan't say I have not,"

he answered. "Anyway theer they be, safe an' sound in the cabinet, an' he as buys it to auction will buy 'em; so you'd best to see to it. Ban't right they should fall into that Newte's hands, for you've refused the man in marriage, so he'm against you for sartain, an' will do you a ill trick if chance offers."

There the conversation ended, and while Sibella, in dire trepidation, sought Richard, Mr. Hatherley proceeded with preparations for the little sale.

His sweetheart's tearful news made Gilbert angry enough; and that Alpheus Newte had furnished no explanation of Gammer Hatherley's departing words also troubled him somewhat. But in this matter Richard suspected the pastor was right when he declared how old people are too often oppressed by visionary ideas. That Granny had anything to leave Sibella, beyond the packet of her father's papers, Richard doubted. The place of these documents, without question, represented the secret long held by young Gilbert's father; and now he considered the trust had descended to him. Mr. Newte was ignorant of their existence if he spoke truth. Indeed only Crab Hatherley knew

of them. Richard's indignation with the latter increased. His first idea was to go down to the castle and take the papers by force; then he listened to Sibella and chose the simpler plan.

"Bid for the cabinet," she said; "there 'll be nobody to outbid you. Johnny Fortnight said he wanted it as a keepsake, but he won't go beyond a few shillings probably. Offer a sovereign and that will settle the matter."

Other ideas less romantic occurred to Richard, but Sibella pressed her own advice and the matter remained so. The day of the auction arrived, and when some five-and-thirty persons appeared to purchase their old neighbour's effects, it was found that Mr. Hatherley had taken an unusual step and arranged to hold the sale in open air.

Inspired by a noble August morning, the old man, with Sibella's help, which was not disdained on this occasion, set to work at dawn, and by nine o'clock had every article that was to be sold carried from his dwelling-rooms in Compton Castle and arranged among the flower-beds at the main entrance. A strange medley was spread under the frank daylight, and the jackdaws upon

the battlements held cawing convention respecting the significance of such unusual gleam and glitter below. The great warming-pan stood amidst scarlet dahlias just unfolding; stacks of plates and crockery arose from the larkspurs and budding asters; tables and chairs lined the pathway; upon the 'upping stock' stood piles of china; a freak had prompted Crab to nail up five German prints against the outer walls of the castle; and the little Sheraton cabinet, as though ashamed of company so humble, hid behind blue spires of monkshood in a corner.

Mr. Michelmore, a sleek and self-sufficient youth from Newton Abbot, blamed old Hatherley not a little for his vagary.

"Idiot!" he said. "The only hope for such rubbish was to sell it in the dark if possible. Here, under the glaring sun, every worm-hole in the wood and every crack in the china can be seen. You'll be lucky if you get five pounds for the lot."

His rostrum was fashioned from a kitchen-chair, and Mr. Michelmore knocked down the poor possessions on the top of a "grandfather" clock.

There were present Mr. Bridle, Richard Gilbert,

Abel Easterbrook and others from Orchard Farm; Sibella and her great-uncle; Farmer Cloberry with lesser celebrities of Upper Marldon, and a sprinkling of cottage folks from the immediate neighbourhood of Compton Castle. Alpheus Newte arrived just as the third lot—two yellow cloam dogs of shining exterior, with red and black spots upon them—had been knocked down for sevenpence to Tim Blake of Orchard Farm. He, poor soul, designed them for his mother, and, after bidding, had turned red to see all eyes fixed upon him. He shivered under such sudden publicity.

"My stars!" he said to Anne Mason, who stood next to him. "You folks will think I be made o' money. Theer's a shillin' tored to tatters all to wance like!"

But he secured the china dogs, and his heart beat so that he thought all must hear it as he stepped back to his place with them, for a muffled tinkle came from the interior of one, and Tim suspected it must be a coin. In reality it was the key of the Sheraton cabinet that had slipped from its cotton wool.

The sale progressed, but not all Mr. Michelmore's

eloquence could charm much money from the pockets of those present, and Crab Hatherley excited some merriment as he limped about reviling those who purchased for shillings what he had hoped would produce half-crowns. Sibella bought several trifles dear to her from recollection; Richard secured the family Bible of the Hatherleys—an heirloom to which Crab attached no importance. Anne Mason purchased two chairs "for the price of firewood," as the auctioneer indignantly declared; and Mr. Cloberry, at the suggestion of Mr. Newte, acquired eight books of old sermons for two shillings. The farmer was secretly annoyed afterwards to find that he might have purchased them at a lower figure; as it was, his first bid instantly stilled all competition, and he departed with four sound but rather heavy theological lights in each pocket.

Sibella's heart sank at the poverty of the prices. She had hoped to bring Richard a ten-pound note in her pocket at the least, but there seemed no prospect of it. Even the teapot of Britannia metal —a thing she deemed of solid value—fetched no more than half-a-crown.

Lot No. 39 was the Sheraton cabinet. Crab

Hatherley dragged it into the light with his eyes on Pastor Newte; and the little gem came forth, as it seemed, reluctantly from its hiding place. Mr. Michelmore perceived that the piece was ancient; otherwise he gazed upon it without intelligence.

"Here," he said, "we have an article of virtoo, a unique creation much more valuable than it looks to your eyes, ladies and gentlemen. I daresay that you might get a couple of pounds for it in Exeter or Torquay. Observe the beautiful shape. The worm-eaten back doesn't matter; collectors wouldn't mind that. Now, then, who says ten shillings?"

"I do," said Richard; and Mr. Michelmore, rather astonished, lifted his hammer, so that the reckless youth should be held to his bargain.

"Stay!" cried Alpheus Newte. "If there is one amongst us that I would not willingly outbid it is Mr. Gilbert, but these matters proceed without prejudice. You understand, don't you, Richard? I, too, have a fancy for this little concern. It has seen better days. There is always a pathos about anything that has seen better days. Moreover, the dear departed woman, our old friend, loved it. For her sake, as well as for the sake of

those she leaves behind her, I will bid—half-a-guinea, or ten and sixpence."

"One pound!" said Richard promptly.

A buzz of excitement arose from the assemblage, and Mr. Newte looked pained and surprised.

"A guinea, then," he said, "though I can ill spare it upon a matter of sentiment. If it was anybody else——"

"Don't talk so much, please; I cannot hear myself speak or catch the bidding," interposed the auctioneer. "Now, what advance on a guinea? The thing's worth five pounds, sentiment or no sentiment. We wait for you, Mr. Gilbert."

"If it's worth five, I'll bid five," said Dick stoutly.

"Five pounds for this unique treasure!" cried Mr. Michelmore, who saw his commission rising. "Now then!" He lifted his hammer.

"Guineas," said Newte. Then he spoke to Richard.

"There is a lack of courtesy in thus seeking to outbid an elder man, Richard Gilbert. Consider the disparity in our ages. I am hurt. I should not have expected it from you."

"Ten pounds," was all the answer he got. Dick's blood was up. He had a hundred pounds of his own money saved, and, seeing the nature of the present contention, and the necessity for victory, he resolved that if need be he would sacrifice half that sum.

"I could find it in my heart to be angry," began Mr. Newte. "Guineas!" he concluded abruptly, as the auctioneer's hammer rose.

And thus that great struggle continued—Richard fiery; the pastor apologetic and much hurt, but equally determined. When the lad had bid fifty pounds, and the man capped it with an offer of fifty guineas, Dick bethought him, and, in response to frantic entreaties from Sibella, addressed the pastor.

"There 's more in this than meets the eye," he said sharply. "The cabinet can't be worth half all that money, and you 're not the man to play the fool like this for nothing. Let me explain. I don't want the wretched box—only certain papers inside it. They are quite private, and concern somebody I 'm interested in. They are no business of yours at any rate, Mr. Newte. The thing is locked, and can't be opened easily because the key

is lost. Now, if you 'll let me have everything in the cabinet I 'll bid no more."

"That 's a fair speech," declared Mr. Michelmore. "What d'you say, sir?"

Alpheus replied.

"I will eat with you and drink with you and pray with you, Richard Gilbert," he said, "but I will not parley with you. You have done me a very ill-turn in thus straining my scanty means to the utmost tension, and nothing but the knowledge that my money will go to better Sibella's fortune would have made me outbid you. It is very unkind and uncharitable. I 'm not pleased about it. To say that I 'm pleased about it would be to tell a deliberate falsehood."

"Will you give up the documents, or will you not?'

"Of course I will. When the cabinet is opened anything—in fact everything—that meets the eye of the observer shall be instantly handed over to its rightful owner. What do you take me for, a thief and a robber? And I have prayed for you and Sibella in open meeting by name! Fifty guineas—not thrown away, I won't say that, but expended by one who can ill afford such a sum."

"Very well then," said Richard; "the thing is yours, and I'll give you ten pounds of the money back, seeing that it might be said I had run you up dishonestly for my own ends. If it 's really worth five pounds, you can sell it again. And you 've only got to thank your own obstinacy that you 've been called upon to pay so much."

"Rather say yours, my son," answered the victor gently, as he mopped his forehead.

"Going then for fifty guineas," said the auctioneer, and he raised his hammer again. "Going—going——"

"What is going?" shouted a loud voice. Unseen by the interested crowd, Sir Archer Baskerville had ridden up over the grass behind them. Now the party made way for him.

"What is going? Not that cabinet, Hatherley? I told you after your sister's death that I designed to purchase that."

"You said ten pounds, an' I was gwaine to give so much for 'e, Squire," replied the old man; "but theer 's been brisk bidding in open market, an' the cab'n't have gone for more."

Crab was very excited. The presence of the

lord of the manor by no means served to check his jubilant demeanour. Now he gesticulated like a puppet on ill-hung wires, and his dim eyes peered back and forward from Sir Archer to Mr. Newte, from the pastor back again to the knight.

"Who among you has bid more?" enquired the great man, twirling his moustache, and gazing round with the look of one who had been outraged in his own house. "This is most irregular," he continued. "I ought to have been communicated with. Supposing the thing had gone, and I had remained in ignorance! Only a great chance brings me here this morning."

"The thing has gone, Sir Archer," ventured Mr. Newte. "It is mine. The hammer fell."

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed the indignant auctioneer.

"Indeed it did, Mr. Michelmore."

"D'you think I don't know when my own hammer falls? I say it didn't. The last bid was fifty guineas."

Sir Archer expressed considerable surprise.

"You bid that?" he asked Alpheus sharply.

"I did."

"You must be mad; the cabinet is not worth it."

"If I may say so without offence, a thing is held to be worth what it will fetch, Sir Archer."

The Knight frowned.

"I 've wanted that cabinet for twenty years," he said, "and I 'm going to have it."

"I should be very sorry indeed to come between you and this piece of furniture," declared the pastor. "If you 'll turn your horse aside a moment out of earshot, I 'll speak a private word. I am quite aware that the spectacle of a poor servant of the Lord bidding fifty guineas for a toy is probably unique; but one can never tell what motives actuate the human breast. Here, behind this laurel, we shall be private."

The horseman, in blank amazement, did as he was bid.

"Now," he said, "what 's this mystery? And please tell me in as few words as you can. Why are you offering about three times its value for this piece of Sheraton?"

Mr. Newte was very hot, and he felt the blood in his head; it danced in his little sloe-black eyes and spoilt their focus. He mopped his face in a

handkerchief, then dried his hands. Only a great thought of the community supported him at this crisis.

"The matter lies in a nutshell," he said. "I have a friend at London who deals in old furniture. Thinking of his interests—for the interests of others are usually my interests—I mentioned this piece of Sheraton, and gave him a close and accurate description of it. He was overjoyed; he blessed me by letter. A wealthy patron owned an exactly similar piece and wanted another to match it. Money was literally no object. Need I say more?"

"Yes, you need," answered the other. "Tell me your limit? It will save time. There 's nothing so amazingly uncommon, either in make or charm, about this thing. There are dozens in England approximately like it. Your friend named a limit naturally. What was it?"

The pastor reflected before replying. He wiped his hands again; then he sighed deeply, and showed an inclination to return to the crowd.

"I 'm cut to the heart to treat you in this way. I can hardly credit myself with strength of purpose to

do it. Yet my duty to my friend—that is sacred naturally. I would lay down my life for my friend. In fact, the auction had better take its course."

"My candid opinion is that you 're a rogue," said the Squire bluntly. "As you please; we 'll have this out in broad daylight."

He returned to the villagers, who showed breathless interest. A few had already congratulated Crab Hatherley and his grand-niece.

"Now us 'll see whether Johnny Fortnight's pocket be so deep as an anointed Lard's," said Tim Blake to another labourer. "Thank God, Squire didn't want my dogs; but I shivered for 'em, I do assure 'e."

"Your dogs!" cried Mr. Bridle. "You ninny-hammer! Why, us could buy a pack of they joanies in Newton for half-a-crown."

"A hundred pounds for that cabinet," said Sir Archer; "so there 's an end of it."

"Guineas," sighed Mr. Newte.

There was the sound of a sad autumnal wind in his voice.

"A hundred and fifty!"

"Guineas."

"Two hundred!"

"Guineas."

Every bid was a dagger in the pastor's heart; in that each advance meant fifty pounds less for the community. Silent amazement sat on every face. Mr. Michelmore raised his hammer slowly and looked at Sir Archer.

"Two hundred and fifty," said the knight.

His anger was rising, though he held himself well in hand. Further he did not propose to go; but he itched to lay his horse-whip across the round red face of his adversary.

"I regret to have to do it, but—guineas," murmured Mr. Newte.

"Then go to the devil, and let him give you good of the trash—you and your precious friend too, and the fool who wants it!" roared Sir Archer. "There's a lie somewhere. I can see it on your ugly face. And look to your money, Hatherley; see you get every farthing out of him."

He rode away with action so abrupt that Tim Blake, who stood beside the gate, was overthrown in his haste to escape Sir Archer's charger. There was a loud crack, and Tim in agony put his hand to

his pocket and brought forth a shattered dog. The Knight swept out of sight, ignorant of the disaster he had caused. Tim grew very white, and his lower lip trembled. He tried to hide his emotion, and flung away the broken fragments.

"Theer'll awnly be wan dog for mother now," he said; "but her'll knaw as I bought two an' paid sevenpence for 'em."

Elsewhere Mr. Michelmore's hammer had fallen. A babel of voices echoed from the great grey front of Compton Castle. Many congratulated Mr. Hatherley; some asked questions of Pastor Newte. But he was deep in thought—calculating the odd shillings. Heavy disappointment sat upon his face, for that day the community had been deprived of more than two hundred and sixty-two pounds.

"The ways of Providence are like the path of the lightning on the thunder-cloud—entirely past our finding out," he said. "Oh, my friends, do not forget the Squire of this parish when you go upon your knees to-night. We have seen how the highest in the land can fall under the dominion of the Evil One. We have witnessed the sins of rage, of covetousness, of envy, hatred and malice, displayed

by a Knight and a Justice of the Peace. He told me to go to the devil, my friends; he condescended to criticise my personal appearance. Yet, plain as it has pleased God to make me, I would not exchange my homely visage for his patrician features as we saw them distorted by wicked passions."

The sale concluded, and upon its termination, followed by excited and chattering people, Crab Hatherley conveyed Mr. Newte's treasure in a wheelbarrow to the pastor's dwelling. Immediately in the rear walked Alpheus himself, with the bearing of chief mourner at a funeral.

"There you are, an' much good may it do you, my holy hero," said the old man as he set down his burden in the other's parlour. "And money on the nail, please."

"You shall have my cheque to-morrow."

"No fay! I shan't take no writin'. I want the stuff. You said to your chapel last Sunday week as you was fed like Elisha by the ravens, and waited 'pon Heaven for your bit an' sup day by day. Best send a raven for thicky money. I must have it in gold or notes, as be so gude as gawld; an' I be gwaine to have it this very day, or I don't

leave the cabinet. Squire said I was to see as I got the money; an' so I will, or else I 'll go to him."

"So be it. You shall have the money if you will return to me within an hour."

Old Hatherley retired, and Mr. Newte, locking his door and pulling down his window-blind, found himself alone with the old cabinet. He shook his head at it and spoke.

"Wretched, inanimate object!" he said, "if I gratified my personal inclinations—a thing I never do—I should tear you limb from limb and hammer you into matchwood. But no such destruction awaits you. I will explore your hidden secrets, in the interest of the community; I will pay this cross-eyed harpy his money, and, having emptied you, I will endeavour yet to effect an understanding with that benighted aristocrat at Upper Marldon. Listen to reason he will not to-day or to-morrow; but we must wait upon him when he has cooled."

CHAPTER IX.

THE POWER OF WORDS.

THERE was but one entrance to the cottage where Mr. Newte had taken his lodgment, and now Crab Hatherley, with a few admiring friends, waited outside and watched it.

He lighted a pipe and puffed thereat, but said little to those about him and answered no questions.

And meantime the pastor was not idle. With a poker he shattered the lock of the cabinet, and soon rested his eyes upon the interior. There reposed two little socks and a bundle of papers. But these did not detain him; he fumbled for the secret spring, pressed it, and revealed that inner receptacle where Granny Hatherley's noble bequest to her son's child was hidden.

"Two hundred and sixty-two pounds ten shillings for an evil old man and a silly girl," murmured Mr. Newte. Then he plunged in his hands to clasp

and crackle the wealth spread beneath; but his fat fingers came empty into his palms, for the secret drawer contained nothing. Frantically the pastor poked and probed into every recess; then he dragged the receptacle out of the cabinet and placed it upon his table; but not so much as a speck of dust remained within it. The man started and his fat face grew pale; he explored the recesses of the cabinet without success, realised that the money was gone and, in a moment of passion, hurled the little masterpiece of Sheraton into a corner. But his self-control instantly returned. He stood silent a moment staring at nothing, then lifted up his voice and, albeit no audience save the unseen attended upon him, spoke aloud.

"Oh, the community!" he gasped. "This—this is a terrible blow for the community. Naked came I into the world, and naked shall I depart out of it; but, alas, the community!"

He sat down and began to reflect upon the difficulty of his position. Either the old woman herself or some other person had removed the money. He examined the cabinet where he had thrown it, to find that the back had fallen out and

the mechanism of the secret drawer was revealed. The upper compartments of the receptacle were still secure, but, upon removal of their hind wall, any person might have access to the secret chamber below. The pastor's quick mind began to see light. His first thought was an orderly retreat; his second idea came nearer to his own character. He tidied himself, repaired to his bedroom, washed his hands and brushed his black hair. Then he hammered the back of the cabinet into place and set the thing upon a chair, but its empty secret drawer he left on the table. And thus he awaited Crab, for the effect of the secret drawer upon the old labourer must decide Alpheus Newte's next action. It would at least tell him whether Mr. Hatherley had the money. He sat still and felt his pulse. It revealed that, though his mind was steady as a rock, the sensational incidents of the day, together with this tremendous climax, had told upon his body. His heart was tired-out and throbbed very weakly. There was brandy in a cupboard, and the good man helped himself generously, then returned to his easy-chair and his thoughts.

Punctually upon an hour's expiration Crab Hatherley entered, and the other rose and locked the door behind him.

"Us 'll have blind up if 'tis all the same to you. I doan't like dealin's in the dark."

"Indeed? You say that? Now I should have thought that the powers of darkness would have suited you much better than honest daylight," returned the pastor. "Leave the blind alone, please. We can see very well. For your own sake I should suggest that it was kept down."

But Crab did not hear. He had caught sight of the secret drawer upon the table, and his eyes flashed with rage as he pointed to it.

"Theer! Theer! I knawed as much! I guessed it fust moment you said as you wanted cabinet! Oh, you damnable man of sin! You scorpion! If I was stronger in the thighs, be cursed if I wouldn't hale you all around Marldons for this; an' tan the hide off you; an' shake your gert yellow false teeth down your lying throat, s'elp me, I would!"

"Be quiet," said Mr. Newte. "Restrain your profanity and sit down. Here we are faced with

one of those occasions where appearances combine to deceive. I have always said that appearances are deceitful. Now you can judge for yourself if I am not right."

"You knawed 'bout that drawer an' the money. Ban't no use you sayin' you didn't. I can see it in your fat, foxy faace. You knawed all the time!"

"And so did you, Mr. Hatherley. Yes, you found it there; and took it away. I frankly admit that I expected to find it. Your sister revealed the secret to me. She had my oath, dear woman, that I would tell no living soul until the right moment. But when I got there the cupboard was bare; and so the poor community had none. Yes, Crab Hatherley, that money was left by your departed sister to do good to others—not to you. I have her last will and testament in my heart—yet a robber, a Pharisee, a 'Crab,' who would devour widows' houses, has come between the dead and her righteous disposal of her hard-earned savings. The widow and the fatherless point their fingers against you. You stand convicted before the angels, before God, and before me of an act so black and shameful

that I don't know what to call it. It doesn't come under any of the commandments, unless it be the eighth. Your soul is damned, Crab Hatherley, damned beyond human power of salvation. Such an old man too! A prayer takes ten years to get to Heaven; you didn't know that, but I have proved it over and over again. If you were on your knees from now to the hour of your death, there would hardly be time for you to place your soul in a position where the betting would be more than evens. Heaven is long-suffering and of great goodness, but even Heaven draws the line somewhere, and the righteous must not suffer in Paradise by having the unrighteous rubbing elbows with them. I tell you, abominable old man, that the resources of the Abode of the Blessed would be taxed to their utmost to provide for such as you. You are damned——"

"Be damned yourself, and shut your mouth!" answered the other fiercely. He had been bewildered by this sudden attack, and now felt beyond measure incensed to find his triumph slipping from him before the other's flood of eloquence. Mr. Hatherley had wit to perceive that the pastor was merely

hiding his rascality behind words, but Crab could find no vantage ground until Alpheus began to dilate upon the next world. Here the clown joined issue, for he believed in no such thing. Beer and brandy were his gods, the sole deities that he knew or desired to believe in.

"Give me my money, and don't brazen out your hookem-snivey wickedness no more," he roared. "Two hundred an' sixty-two pound ten shillin' I want afore I leave this room. Gimme that; an' as for hell, you 'll be theer afore me yet if you anger me, for, auld as I am, I 'll hit you awver the napper-case an' scat your wicked brains all awver the floor this instant moment!"

"To say so," answered Mr. Newte, "is to threaten assault and battery. I scorn it. In a north-westerly direction from our present position lies Dartmoor—remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow. The prison settlement of Princetown, recently established on its stony bosom, is reserved for those who merit five or more years of penal servitude. Therefore, have a care, you abandoned wretch! Money from me! I stand here for the fatherless children, and widows, and all that are desolate and

oppressed; I represent the women labouring with child, the prisoners and captives—the community, in fact. Money from me! I want the money of the dead from you, Joshua Hatherley, rightly named Crab by the unerring intuition of the vulgar. I am here to squeeze this Crab, to extract the juices from him. He shall render to Cæsar the things which be Cæsar's; and if he doesn't he shall be locked up."

"Aw jimmery! You say that to me! An' you to go on your way wi'out a finger pointed against you. You get away behind words, like a fitch behind its stink!"

"Let those without sin cast the first stone," answered Mr. Newte. "Now you become slightly more reasonable. You have your modest share of intellect. Be thankful. I gather from your last remark that you see a little of the disgraceful fix you're in. I have only to point at you as a man who has a thousand pounds that don't belong to him, and—why, not a publican would serve you this side of Plymouth. You know the extent of my rounds. I have only to say, 'Do not permit this man to drink in your public-

house,' and all stimulant is denied to you for miles around. But listen; I am not a harsh man. I understand human frailties — nay, I am not devoid of them myself. One can overdo well-doing. We must be just before we are generous. You follow me, Mr. Hatherley."

"Did her leave the money to that gal?"

"Great is truth, though it does not prevail nearly as often as good books would have us believe. For myself, I practise it when the world will let me. It is the world that makes men liars. Yes, she left all her savings to the orphan Sibella—not a penny to you."

"Damned auld cat!"

"She was very wrong to forget her brother. That is why, under Providence, I have taken over this trust in my own person. You are really a fortunate man, Crab Hatherley, for this girl would not have given you a penny, whereas I make you a present of many pounds."

"If you split on me I'll split on you," said the cowed ancient. "I doan't knaw what the deuce you'm chitterin' about. Your words be like hail on a slate roof; but so sure as you say a word

against me, I 'll up an' tell what I knaw against you."

"You know nothing against me, except that I had to bid the monstrous sum of two hundred and fifty guineas to secure the welfare of the community. That will redound very much to my credit hereafter, if not here. But the question is, What course am I to take with you, Crab Hatherley? Nothing is gained in these sad cases by publicity or by harshness. My own unvarying rule has ever been to treat every fellow-creature with gentleness and kindness and generosity, and never—never to let my right hand know what my left hand doeth. The instincts of a lifetime will not desert me at this crisis. I have no desire to cloud your character or make any fuss. A negotiation seems quite reasonable and not impossible. In this world the strength of the individual is the strength of the community. We must, in fact, give and take. It is the law of nature and of heaven. I may also remind you that without witnesses men have to trust to good faith."

"You 'll make a bargain?"

"It may be possible if you can trust me."

Mr. Hatherley's face began to assume an exceedingly crafty expression.

"Shows you 've a shaky case, however, if you 'll do that. I wish to God I 'd got more brains—then I 'd awverthrow 'e. 'Tis just your blasted cunnin' be tu gert for my honesty."

"You may think yourself fortunate that I 'm a Christian, and invariably turn the cheek to the smiter. Go if you like — leave me — take your dastardly robbery away and ask your friends about it. I do not mind. I know you have the money, and I know well how to recover it; but——"

"No need to say no more," responded the other, sulkily. "I give you best; you 'd talk the leg off a horse. I caan't cope with 'e. Say halves an' have done with it."

Alpheus Newte pondered this proposal. The question was solely the amount of Crab Hatherley's intelligence and consequent power.

"No," he said at last. "You are unreasonable. "Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise. You do not in the least know the value of five hundred pounds. Your design and ambition apparently is to drink yourself to death. Well,

better men than you have done it—on much less money. Beer and spirits may be procured in enormous, fabulous quantities for a comparatively small outlay. I admit that you have a right to demand good quality. But the best malt liquor is cheap; and as for spirits, if you want to prolong life, as well as enjoy continued intoxication, you will avoid them. I offer you one of two things: I will take all the money and give you ten shillings a week for the rest of your life; or I will place in your hand two hundred pounds. I may point out that there are no alternatives. It is that or nothing; because if you reveal the existence of the money, I, on my side, must announce that it was left for a specific object. It is only my personal regard for you, as a lost sheep, which prompts such an offer. You understand that we feel more joy over one sinner which repenteth than over ninety-nine just persons. There are not ninety-nine just persons in Lower Marldon, but that is by the way. The sum of two hundred pounds will place you above the necessity of any more work. At your advanced age, it might be permissible for you to live upon your capital.

Spend a pound a week if you like. And if, at the end of the four years, you are still alive and responsible for your actions, I will give you a little more money. Upon my word of honour I will."

"Make it two hundred and fifty," begged the old man. "I ban't long for this world, an' I've worked more 'n sixty years for two shillin' a day. 'Tidn't vitty as I should do any more work."

"Two shillings a day for sixty years represents an enormous sum of money, though I am not mathematician enough to calculate it in my head. You ought to have saved and be assisting your poorer neighbours to-day. However, you'll have to settle that with the recording angel."

"Make it two-fifty an' let it be.

"Very well, I'll give you the two hundred and fifty you ask and more," answered the pastor, suddenly moved by a shrewd inspiration. "I'll pay you the sum I bid for the cabinet, on the condition that you leave this neighbourhood and go and settle twenty miles away from it."

"So I will then. I don't care a curse for the place, nor yet the people, and I'd so soon be

out o' sight o' Orchard Farm as not. Baan't a yard of their damned acres my sweat haven't watered."

"I perspire freely myself, and it is a sign of grace and a means of health," said Mr. Newte. "Very well then; I'll come home with you and get the money. I wish I thought you'd put your share of it to a worthy purpose, but you won't."

"Ah, Johnny Fortnight," sighed Mr. Hatherley, "what 'tis to have the gift of tongues an' a hide of brass. I knaw, so well as I knaw the sun be settin', that you've bested me this day, yet for the life of me, my brains do grow that mazed I can't tell wheer to have 'e. Theer's dark dealin' somewheers, yet be blessed if I know how to get upsides wi' your tongue."

"It cannot be done, brother Hatherley. For why? Because I wear the breastplate of righteousness and am shod with Truth."

"Shod wi' the dowl's awn shoon, if ye ax me. An' what 'bout thicky cabinet?"

"The piece of Sheraton? Why, that is mine surely. Haven't I paid enough for it?"

"Theer's another thing—she, that blessed gal Sibella. She was to have all the money from the auction, but promised me half of it. I ban't gwaine to share this 'ere money with she!"

"Well, from the point of view of old Mrs. Hatherley, she was to have all, but we have agreed that the ancient woman was wrong. Leave Sibella to me. I will look after her, and see that she has what is better than money. Now I'll come along with you for that little matter of filthy lucre that, somehow, slipped out of this secret drawer. You found it when you were tidying up, no doubt. It must have been a great temptation, but I congratulate you that you were able to resist it. Be sure these things will go to your credit."

"If I could kill 'e wi'out being stringed up for it, I would," retorted the old man.

"You know not what you say, Crab Hatherley. Here, take this roll of blue papers. They belong to Sibella. I promised them to her. Carry them with you, please; and don't forget to give them to her. Young Gilbert was coming here this evening for them. Let me see, there will be a question of

some odd pounds and shillings in our settlement. I 'll bring it with me."

He unlocked a cupboard, took from it a desk, and out of that a leathern purse. Next he counted certain gold and silver coins into his hand, returned the purse and desk, then locked the cupboard.

"Now we will go upon our way," he said. "But let me see that my Sheraton cabinet is quite safe."

He unlocked the door, saw Mr. Hatherley out, made fast his castle again, and followed the old man.

Outside, Crab was cheered by a patient and expectant party. "Hast got the money?" cried two or three.

The sight of Mr. Newte caused laughter.

"Ah, Jonny Fortnight," shouted a godless young man, the blacksmith of the village, "you 've outreached yourself this time, my bold bwoy. For a chap in London! Gammon an' spinach! You was drunk to auction, that was the matter, an' Squire 'll have 'e by the heels yet for setting yourself up against un."

"This place," said Mr. Newte loudly, "is the

Evil One's own happy hunting-ground, I do think. I say it reluctantly, but with absolute assurance. And I will not be called Johnny Fortnight any more by you or anybody, Aaron Clegg. You think your work is warm because you labour in red-hot iron, like Tubal Cain; but wait, wait, Aaron Clegg, until the trump of Doom. Consider the temperature of Hell, miserable blacksmith. Burst yourself blowing your bellows and you'll never reach one thousandth part of the heat that rises from the burning, fiery furnace! Yes, he *has* got his money —every farthing of it—and he'll tell you so. Go back to your forge and give your vain soul to your Maker, that He may mould it on the anvil of His righteousness as you mould the shoe and the tyre."

"Touch the man, an' words come tumblin' out of un like feathers off a goose," said Aaron. Then he departed into the dark depths of the forge, and Mr. Newte, with Crab Hatherley, proceeded to Compton Castle.

Soon the disconsolate ancient had produced his little hoard. More bitter words passed, but the inevitable end came. Old Hatherley was left with

the price of the cabinet, and Mr. Newte returned home richer by the sum of seven hundred and thirty-seven pounds ten shillings.

Later in the day, over some tea, some bread-and-butter, and half a boiled rabbit, Alpheus speculated as to how Sir Archer Baskerville might be approached with the piece of Sheraton. But reluctantly he came to the conclusion that such a step was impossible.

CHAPTER X.

A COSTLY FLAME.

LEFT to himself, Mr. Hatherley indulged in a flow of the worst language at his command. Only the walls of Compton Castle heard him, and it is unlikely that even in the spacious times a more unbridled and passionate outburst of expletive had echoed against their venerable stones. Elizabethan heroes at least swore like gentlemen; but Crab Hatherley's vituperation was of the most uncultured sort to be imagined. He cursed for an hour; then having scorched, blasted, defamed, and eternally condemned Alpheus Newte to everlasting fires, the old man felt that gentle lassitude and waste of nervous energy proper to such an explosion. He, therefore, prepared to seek solace at the "Unicorn" Tavern; but first he flung off his black coat, donned out of respect to the recent auction, thrust it into an old chest that contained his sparse wearing

apparel, and put on the familiar earth-coloured garments of his daily life. Then he set out to drown trouble according to his custom.

Elsewhere pastor Newte completed a heroic day with a heroic deed. Returning home, as we have seen, and fortified to the action by an excellent meal, he considered the future of the Sheraton cabinet. In his heart he longed to take it to Sir Archer Baskerville, but the necessity for a continued web of falsehood alarmed him.

"To do evil that good may come is very well here and there, in judicious hands, though not a course to be recommended to the majority," he reflected; "still, one has an immortal soul to save —I cannot disguise that fact from myself. I may sometimes obscure my meaning in words when addressing the common herd; but of course I know in my own heart the difference between right and wrong—nobody better."

He decided therefore that Sir Archer must be left alone. As matters stood, Alpheus had paid the money like a man; and, to avoid further investigation or discussion, it seemed good to maintain the deception and announce his cabinet's

departure to the metropolis. But Mr. Newte did not know anybody in London. He looked from the cabinet to the fire; from the blaze upon his hearth back to the cabinet again. He lighted his "churchwarden," and decided future action upon a pipe of tobacco. A definite deed seemed indicated, but he postponed this step until after nightfall, when Lower Marldon slept.

It was well that he waited; for before the good man's pipe had been smoked, there came visitors in shape of Sibella and Richard.

Mr. Newte greeted them tenderly, almost affectionately.

"I have for you, dear Sibella, a memento that I think you will regard as grateful," he said. Then going to the cabinet, he produced all that now remained therein: a little pair of infant's socks.

"These touching relics, my child, appear to have belonged to your dear father. It is therefore right and proper that they should be handed to you. His little feet once filled these tiny receptacles; the author of your being, Sibella, wore these pathetic little contrivances upon his baby toes, —about half a century ago, I imagine—if not more,

For his sake cherish them, and set them amongst your heirlooms. And do not forget the giver. I am in a position, moreover, to prove that they actually did belong to William Hatherley, for I had your grandmother's word for it. These socks were among her most valued possessions."

Sibella thanked Mr. Newte, and put the treasure into her pocket not without emotion; then Richard spoke:

"And the papers? I suppose they were there, too. The papers you undertook to return to me —where are they?"

"You are quite safe, my lad. There they were sure enough, and they await Sibella at her home. Mr. Hatherley took them with him when he went back; and as I returned to the castle in his company, you may rest assured that they are safe. You have only to ask him for them."

Young Gilbert regarded the cabinet curiously.

"I'll never believe you again, Newte—never, for all your prayers and preaching. To say you wanted a keepsake of the old lady, and then give hundreds for a man in London! You're not a plain dealer, and everybody in the Marldons will know it by to-morrow."

"Where's the man I have wronged, Richard? Tell me that. Was I bound to offer more than a guinea if I could get the cabinet so cheaply? Do not you understand that I was bidding with somebody else's money? I can solemnly swear that I was if you like. I didn't want the cabinet any more than you did. I had to do my duty to the community. But I cannot argue with you. Let it suffice that all is well that ends well, and let Him who judgeth motives decide the rest. I may remark that the man Crab Hatherley shows an inclination to keep all that money for himself. Will you have a cup of tea or a pipe of tobacco? Neither; then leave me. I have been through a very worldly day, a very tiresome and exasperating day. It is a great source of sorrow to to me that I have fallen out with the Squire of this parish; yet, what would you? My duty to my neighbour stood between."

"Sir Archer will never forgive you, that's a certainty," declared Richard; then he and Sibella went on their way.

The shadows lengthened and night came quickly. Hours passed, and still Mr. Newte smoked and

kept up a good fire though it was a warm evening. But after the last villager had tramped down the street past his window, after the steady snoring of the ancient woman in whose cottage he dwelt sounded down the stone passage from the kitchen, Alpheus set to work. Taking off his coat, his collar and his tie, removing his linen cuffs and turning up the sleeves of a flannel shirt, the worthy man took stern measures with the ancient treasure of Sheraton, and so dealt with it that never again might the work of art rouse discord or breed envy in human breast. To be plain, he broke its slender framework into many pieces, and with them fed his fire until nearly midnight. No outraged ghost appeared to protest against this sacrilege; and when nothing remained but white dust and ashes, the pastor spread his hand and delivered a theatrical blessing, for sheer love of the theatrical. So he retired to his bed, and presently slept like a healthy child.

But long before this vandal deed Sibella and Richard had passed through the gathering gloaming to Compton. A belated blackbird sped with shrill chink-chink-chink from one huge ivy-tod to another. Faint chirrupings and rustlings overhead marked the

sleeping-places of the sparrows; bats with abrupt and zig-zag flight wheeled round about the ruin, silhouetted sharply against the green western sky; and sleep crept insensibly over all. A young moon, sailing aloft unclouded, already touched with silver the polished leaves of the laurels and ivy, and threw faint shadows upon the earth.

Mr. Hatherley was not at home, and the dwelling-rooms seemed so deserted and lonely, now the auction had near emptied them, that Sibella would not enter the house, but chose to wait for her great-uncle outside in the moonlight. She was to abide at Compton for a week, and then take up residence with a kinswoman at Higher Marldon until the details of her marriage should be complete.

Now boy and girl walked together under the castle walls in a great shadow, and he dreamed the old dreams, and she listened and believed in the old fashion.

Over against them, ghostly in the pale light, gleamed the whitewash front of Orchard Farm. From the owl-tree—a pollarded elm hard by it—came the cry of the wise bird; a watch-dog bayed the moon, and so still was the night that they

heard his chain clank as he dragged it roughly after him.

"The farm looks like a white ghost; and from there the castle looks like a grey one. How the moonlight seems to suck away all the colour from the orchards. Yet they shone under the sun this morning."

"Never mind them, Sibby; put your little arm round me—there."

"To think we'll be married before next apple-blossom, Dick!"

"Ages before. The cider that's making presently will scarcely be ready for drinking at our wedding. We'll be an old married couple before the trees bloom again. Mother showed me yesterday where you'll have to plant your apple-tree—next to where she set hers the day before she was married. Her tree is a brave one now and a great bearer. You'll not mind living with dear mother, Sibella?"

"No, indeed, Dick, though I'm a little frightened of her sometimes. She seems so above us."

"It's only because she's older and has seen more of the world, and had the sorrow to lose father.

Widows such as mother, whose hearts are so big they can only love once, grow into tragical figures sometimes—like she is. I can't explain what I mean, but there's something terrible about the loneliness of mother. And to know she'll always be so. Nobody—not even I, her own son—can get inside that loneliness. She goes and moves about among the trees that father planted. There's a look in her eyes as if she'd come from seeing his spirit sometimes. I think she's only contented then."

"These are the thoughts that make me afraid."

"Yet you needn't be. She's as gentle to all as her voice is gentle. And always was so. Her great silences are part of herself. Father understood them."

"Oh, if I could be such a wife to you as she was to your father!"

"You will be, you will be. D'you think I don't know that? Such a wife as never a man had yet—worth a thousand such husbands as I. Yet I'll try to make you see a little of the oceans of love I've got for you. I'll think of your happiness sleeping and waking; I'll work for you with my hands and

my head; I'll do all the Prayer Book says and a good score things it forgets to mention."

"It's all a dream. To think that there was such a wonderful man as you in the world, and to think that he could come to care for me! Oh, Dick, how is it? I'm never tired of wanting to know. What did you see to love in a poor, penniless, ordinary sort of girl like your Sib?"

"I loved her eyes and her hair and her voice and her laugh, and her gentleness, and her pluck, and her fondness for little children, and—and—and, best of all, I loved her for loving me. When you find a girl loves you, Sib—I can't tell you what a tremendous sacred sort of feeling it is. To think that a living thing, who never loved anybody before, and who looked at men as merely a sort of different creature with different aims and interests and ideas and needs—to think that a girl can suddenly love you and want you, and be content to give herself to you and find the world has no greater happiness than you. If I had big words I'd try to explain how I felt; but I can only say that when you loved me, and told me so, the very colour of things changed and grew brighter. Love knocks the

scales off a man's eyes, Sib. It's a lie to say that it puts rose-coloured spectacles on us. Nobody really sees clear till they're in love."

"And yet they talk about it like measles or whooping-cough, as if it was a thing you caught and got over."

"Nobody who loves properly—as we do—ever gets over it. I'm positive of that. Wise people don't laugh at it; only little puny-hearted wretches who don't know what it really means. It's an everlasting thing, Sibella; and if we live to be a hundred we'll love as we do now—not less, but more. And if one dies——"

"Don't, Dick—don't say that. We love too much to die, dearest. Love like ours is proof against dying. I couldn't leave you, Dick."

So they prattled to mutual edification until through the night came the sound of a voice uplifted, and under the moon rose the music of Mr. Hatherley. He had buried sorrow many a good quart deep in Burton ale; he had also buried equilibrium of mind and body. He was, in fact, returning to his well-earned rest on all fours, and his song—an effusion not to be republished

after the night of fifty years—happily required more articulation than Crab had power to bestow upon it; therefore the words were hidden from Sibella's ears. The old man brayed cheerfully, rolled to his door, and sat down on the 'upping stock' outside it to collect himself. Then Richard and Sibella appeared, took each an arm of him, and conducted him to his apartment.

He thanked them, but showed a measure of caution at sight of fellow-creatures and relapsed into a complete silence. For a moment Richard, supposing him to be less intoxicated than was the case, ventured to ask for the papers that belonged to Sibella; but Crab, reminded of the morning, fell promptly back upon evil language. Sibella thereupon vanished; and when she had gone her great-uncle grew calm again, and explained as best he could that the documents were in his coat-pocket that morning, but had fallen out somewhere upon the road.

"I looked for 'em 's evening, an' they was gone—God knaws wheer they be to. Better lost no doubt, for they 'd awnly tell some story best forgot. All writing comed through the dowl—his awn idea to teach men folk that. Thank God I never larned—

a damned trick as 'll land best part o' the world in hell, my son. Theer 'll be some ugly reading come Judgment Day; but none o' mine, none o' mine. Now, take off my boots, will 'e? Then I 'll get in my bed."

Richard obeyed, and, having dragged the drunkard to his couch, made so bold as to search in Mr. Hatherley's pockets for the missing papers. Naturally he failed to find them, and so returned to Sibella, who awaited him downstairs. Her grief at his news was not small; but he inspired her with hope before he departed, expressed confidence that the missing documents must surely appear at daylight, and promised himself to use his best efforts to win them back for his sweetheart at the earliest opportunity on the morrow. Sibella, for her part, undertook a close search, and she was diligently seeking her possessions long after Richard had left her. But the true hiding-place — her great-uncle's Sunday coat, in his clothes chest — she could not come at, for he never allowed anybody to enter his den, on the second story of the castle, excepting when it became necessary to assist him to do so.

CHAPTER XI.

GLORY IN THE ORCHARDS.

WHEN morning returned and brought with it sobriety for Sibella's great-uncle, he still maintained his position of the previous night, and declared that the papers must have fallen from his pocket in the village. Time, however, did not reveal them, and as the day advanced Sib's spirits sank before her serious loss.

For the present it was supposed that Crab Hatherley, who had now resigned his daily labours at Orchard Farm, would become caretaker at Compton. Of the castle's history he knew nothing, and his great-niece, who was accustomed to conduct visitors over the ruin and had its simple story by heart, now set about planting the narrative in the mind of her great-uncle. But he proved a slow learner, and what he committed to memory one day had usually slipped from him by the next. Folks foretold that his tenure in his old home was

likely to be short, and prophesied that as soon as Sibella left Compton Castle Sir Archer Baskerville would find it necessary to seek a new guardian for the ruin.

In secret Mr. Hatherley designed to disappear within a few days at most, and postponed his payments to Sibella for that reason.

On a morning in mid-October the girl went to Orchard Farm, upon a rumour that her papers had been found and taken by a stranger to Totnes; but when she reached the great orchard, at this season alive with busy workers, Richard met her and informed her that her hope was vain. He had already made investigation, and found the report untrue.

Under great light from above—a light caught, echoed, intensified from all the glow and glory of autumn foliage and autumn fruit—the orchard basked. A pearly dew still lay heavy upon the orchard grasses; and above them the grey pillars of this woodland fane stretched their bejewelled and bending boughs. Through the depths, barred with many a sun-glint and sheaf of light, each avenue of the outspreading acres terminated in dim,

delicious hazes of opaline blue. Here upon the confines of the fruit-lands was Autumn's breath made visible under hazel hedges, already thinning, and great elms, touched at sundry points with sudden outbreak of yellow in the midst of their dark green. Beneath the aisles of the trees stole a delicate vapour, apple-scented; and the very spirit of the hour seemed visible,—a hazy being whose diaphanous robe twinkled with diamonds of nightly dew, was fragrant with the odour of ripe fruit. Little hills of pure colour shone out beneath the trees, where the apples, gathered up in heaps, awaited their journey to the presses; and these mounds were shadowless; they rose in triangles and cones of light against the weeds and grasses; for each round fruit-cheek caught the brightness from its adjacent neighbours and reflected the same upon its own shining skin. Sunshine dappled the fallen fruit into small pyramids and islands and lakes of scented red and gold against the shadowed ground; and above them leaf and fruit strove for mastery in splendour of colour. The slope of the land added another beauty to this vision. From survey of the wealth

fallen and to fall, a beholder's eyes were lifted in mid-distance to the trees themselves, receding from him, where all the crowns of them were spread upward and onwards over the bosom of the hills. Each tree possessed its proper colour-note of lemon or crimson, sere or golden-green. Fruit and foliage often matched in this great sun-clad pageant of living flame, and a riotous, unrecorded splendour glowed like a nimbus over the round heads of each old patriarch, where the whole woodland temple of them, in high festival, poured forth garnered wealth of colour and sweetness to its deity. A notable pagan atmosphere marked the moment; Pomona moved invisible under the uplifted boughs; while each gnarled and crooked branch, whose fruit was nested in grey lichens, each spray of younger wood, that bent with graceful bow earthward under bossy weight of its coral and amber and orange-streaked harvest, made obeisance to the goddess. Every tree seemed at once a pillar of the temple and a worshipper therein; the great orchard swam away into distance with all its mellow harmonies; it retreated and faded and covered itself with haze, until all the mingled

colours merged into a cloth of pale gold, laid upon the shoulders of the hills. Above, silver stubbles were vanishing under the ploughs of the husbandmen; red furrows ascended to the sky-line, and grain hidden there already felt the thrill of earth, and waited only for the rain to pulse an answer. Roots swelled to their round maturity; oak and beech scattered their harvests; every hedgerow and dingle, every river-valley and forest dell teemed with their proper treasure of berries black and red, of seeds that fell and down that floated, of aigrettes and tassels and cups and cones, all brimming with the store and profit of the year. Hidden in the lap of the Mother the birds' eyes brightened, and the squirrel and the red mouse gloried in their garners; under ten thousand apple-trees and over miles of ruddy land, man plucked or dug his produce with gladness; hope reigned triumphant for the fleeting moment. Beneath this sunlit hour the cares and fears of husbandry were forgotten; and the very echo of the cooper's mallet on the cider-barrel rang merry rather than melancholy, for it chimed with the shout and laughter of happy children.

Richard presented his lady with a plump russet, harsh of rind, but sweet and sugary within. As she nibbled it and bewailed her loss, for time by no means lessened the maid's sorrow at this misfortune, there came towards them Mary Gilbert. She moved slowly where ladders stood against the trees, and invisible hands dropped fruit into outspread aprons. She walked so that her foot should not bruise the least dwarfed and ruined appleling that had met misfortune and failed of its blossomed hope. She loved them all, and regarded each tree and each mound of fruit as a mother looks at her last-born. And now she put her hands on Sibella's shoulders, and their sun-bonnets met over a soft kiss.

"Good-morning to you, li'l maid," she said. "So sweet and fresh as a ripe apple yourself, though sorrow's clouding your eyes yet, I seem."

"'Tis the papers, dear mother. I was in a flutter of hope they'd been found. But 'twas false news. Dick proved that my loss had nothing to do with the matter."

"You must give them up and count upon your share of happiness without them."

"Yet 'tis hard. They would have told me where my mother came from and all about her belike. Such a power of pleasant thoughts were waking at the very dream of it; and now a dream it will always be."

"You 'll know as much as most in like case. You had a mother, an' we 'll be happy an' content to think she was so good an' blithe an' bonny as yourself. Please God a measure of happiness fell to her when she first cuddled you an' looked on your face; we 'll be glad to see her again in you. Dream on about her; an' dream she was very good an' very fair, an' a winged angel now, not further from 'e than the fruit shining overhead."

Sibella stared with all her blue eyes, and even Dick looked astonished. It was seldom Mary Gilbert spoke so many words in a day as she had within a minute now. The scent of the apples touched her heart and it was full. She, too, could dream, and now in this returned pomp of the apple harvest it seemed to her that her husband was alive again. He moved with light footfall in every glade, and amid the echo of the voices she distinguished his.

"We make our awn havage,* li'l maid," she said. "'Tis not writ on dusty auld papers, but in the years of our life. 'Tis we as do throw a light upon the dead an' gone, not they upon us. You'll understand when you are aulder an' wiser an' sadder. Where we be going to is the matter; not where we be come from."

She moved away among the distant workers, and left her son standing beside Sibella.

"Mother do seem a part of all this," he said. "She's uplifted into many words to-day. Your pretty face always brings a soft look into her eyes. Thank God she likes you well, an' I know you 'll look to it she never loves you less than now."

Mr. Bridle, smelling of apple-juice, came from a distant press.

"Where's missis?" he asked, then stopped, seeing Sibella, and bid her good-day. "Us be all grievous grieved, I'm sure, 'bout they vexatious papers. Awnly last night to the 'Unicorn' a chap said as he judged they must be drownded deep in the brook, else your offer of five pounds for 'em would have surely brought 'em back to 'e. 'Tis

* Ancestry.

a ill-convenient thing not to knaw your awn mother's maiden name an' nation, though for her stock, lookin' at you, I 'd stake my Sunday dinner her was English, an' that you 'm the living daps of her."

"It 's a very exasperating thing, and that old fool ought to be responsible," grumbled Richard.

"Nothin' comes by chance," declared Mr. Bridle. "It had to be, an' the Houses of Parliament an' all the locks an' keys in London wouldn't have kep' 'em safe 'gainst the masterful contrivance of Jehovah. But you 'm none the worse; you 'm alive, an' sound wind an' limb, wi' gude health an' a far-reachin' trust in Christ's mercy. That 's gude testimony to them as got you, blue papers or no blue papers. Words can't make you no better than you be—no better nor worse. You knaw your faither, whether or no, which bain't no small blessing in this onruly world, an' often a blamed sight harder than to tell your female parent. A Hatherley you was, an' a Gilbert you will be; so no call to fret, I 'm sure."

This wide philosophy comforted Sibella, and she moved along towards the press amid a score of

men and women busy in and below the trees. Richard knew the character of the fruit only less well than his mother, and now he talked learnedly concerning it, of the properties peculiar to varieties, of the perfect blends necessary for good cider, and of the healing and saving virtues undoubtedly possessed by that historic liquor. He treated of 'Tom Putts,' 'Bitter Sweets,' 'Stubberds,' and other fruits; showed Sibella trees grafted with different scions, and surprised her before the spectacle of two sorts springing from one stem and hanging showers of ripe fruit, half green, half crimson, above the same grey stock. The harvest on these, if less numerous than upon the aged trees, was rounder, larger, of richer colour, and more splendid substance. They walked along, while Dick and Mr. Bridle expounded apple-lore. Then into the colour harmonies, growing greater out of distance, was suddenly introduced a blotch of black. It developed, took shape, and revealed a stout squat man with a black basket slung upon his shoulder and a tall staff in his hand. Johnny Fortnight soon stood beside Sibella and the rest; then he set down his load, mopped his face, and asked for a sweet apple.

"You will recollect how the burden rolled from the shoulders of Christian, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*," he said; "even so this basket, companion of my back these twenty years, is about to roll off it for ever. I am giving up the business, and shall be your 'Johnny Fortnight' no more, for my ministry at Upper Marldon has become self-supporting, thank God. Henceforth I provide buttons for the breeches of righteousness, and hooks and eyes for the stays of salvation. Of course, this is all an allegory. What are those red apples, Richard Gilbert? They look better than this one tastes."

"Try them, if you please. We call them 'cheat the boys,' because they are not what they seem. Good in cider, but mighty bad in the mouth."

"What a sermon hangs there! The world's trees are laden heavy with 'cheat the boys,' Richard; aye, and 'cheat the girls' too, not to mention the men and women. Oh, let us one and all pray to be kept from the lust of the eye,—but I 'll spare you that until next Sunday. Come to our Gospel Nest on the Sabbath and hear my apple sermon, will you? That is the way to preach. Build a foundation on what a man knows and touches in his every-day life.

Then upon it erect the fabric of your discourse. So even the fool cannot fail to understand."

Mr. Bridle took it upon himself to answer this statement.

"You discourse a deal too much, however," he said. "There's times to talk and times to be shut. 'The heart of fools is in their mouth; but the mouth of the wise is in their heart.' The Preacher, twenty-sixth of twenty-one. You see, theer be others as can quote Scripture beside you."

"Even so. Yet hear the Preacher again, since you are so familiar with him. 'The pipe and the psaltery make sweet music, but a pleasant tongue is above them both.' There's chapter an' verse for yours, John Bridle. Put a bridle on your own lips, according to the word of the Apostle James, and mind your own business, which is not preaching to your betters, my friend," retorted the pastor. Then he chattered on before the indignant headman of Orchard Farm could make any answer:

"These bending boughs remind me of a sad story from out Ogwill way—sad, yet instructive. You won't remember Farmer Clymo? No, he was before your time. His day was done and his

tragic family experiences at an end thirty years ago. An apple-grower, too, in a large way of business. His cider may have been sweet for all I know, but his temper, unhappily, proved so bitter that his good lady—a virtuous woman until he shattered her sense of right—found life impossible with him, and took the law into her own hands. He awoke one morning to discover her absent from his side, and then, hastening to seek her, found the partner of his joys and sorrows hanging by the neck to an old apple-tree. She had destroyed herself, choosing an eternity of discomfort, poor soul, rather than a few more years with her husband, Simon Clymo. How right is the poet when he says that 'it is better to bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of'! But the man, old and cranky though he was, found yet another female to share his lot. With more courage than judgment, a maiden, not yet turned thirty, married him for his money, and expected soon to see him safely shuffle off the stage of life—a reasonable hope on her part, seeing that the old hunks was above seventy-five years of age. But mark the sequel, and observe how this unlovely

match was frowned upon by Heaven. Driven desperate under the cruelties and brutalities of that disgraceful old man, the second Mrs. Clymo gradually lost hope. Hope slipped from her day by day. There seemed reason to believe that her spouse would live for ever, whereas the wretched woman, on the contrary, felt herself fast become old and decrepit. She took to drink, while the ancient apple-grower drained away her unhappy life like a vampire,—like a vampire, I say,—until one dark winter's morning—what happened? He awoke to find his wife was not beside him. A horrible thought brought senile tears of joy into his wicked eyes. He rubbed them, crept from his bed, donned his garments, and, impelled by a sort of diabolic instinct, went straight forth into the orchard and sought the tree whereon his first wife had committed suicide. It had been a shy bearer ever since, by the way, though prolific before the tragedy. But now, although it was dead of winter, fruit of a sort depended from those ancestral boughs. Oh, my friends, can you guess what hung there? I see by your faces that you do. Mr. Clymo's second wife had followed the example set by his first—so prone

are we all to follow a bad example. The man found himself again a widower—sad enough, but worse remains behind. Within a week from that time, the tragedy being noised abroad and the country-side ringing with it, old Clymo had no less than three-and-thirty applications, all from married men, for cuttings of his apple-tree. These atrocious husbands offered considerable inducements, and one went so far as to promise five golden guineas if the possessor of that accursed plant would permit him to dig it up and transfer it, lock, stock, and barrel, to his own farm. The depravity of the human mind, Richard Gilbert! But there came certain indignant and virtuous men by night and sawed down that apple-tree, and clove its boughs, and rent its roots, and made firewood of it, very properly. So the old scamp never married again—though whether that was because he had lost his tree, who shall say? But what a lesson, what a whole series of lessons, I'm sure!"

They proceeded then to where Mrs. Gilbert stood, framed in the doorway of the cider mill. Her dress was the colour of dry leaves; her placid eyes were autumn-lighted.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MOTHER OF THE APPLES.

SUNSHINE streamed upon Mary Gilbert, and she stood stately as a priestess on a temple's threshold framed in the velvety darkness of the open portal. There sharp shadow cut the sun-glory, save where from one crack in the slate roof of the mill a strong pencil of light fell and expanded into a fan that touched the huge shining screw of the press with fire, and set the moats dancing across the gloom. Without, great heaps of brown "mock," or crushed apple, lay, and silver-spangled fowls pecked the pips out. Fiery hot was this mass from fermentation; but the apples already piled within upon the platform, and waiting their second crushing, were cool and still half full of cider. In the midst of the pounding-house stood the press—a giant of huge oaken beams and massive struts. Like an idol in some shrine the steel screw arose from the

midst, and beneath the great head of the press, as upon an altar of sacrifice, the mock was piled in successive layers, wrapped and packed firmly into great cloths of horsehair. This medium was a novelty in those days, and many old men argued for the older and inferior method of packing the press with straw. Within an adjacent building the apples were being broken for the pounding, and from a broad wooden lip above a trough, masses of the crushed fruit slithered and fell in pulp, while beneath, a horse plodded in the dark and turned the crushing mill.

"We be 'doubling' now," explained Mr. Bridle, for the benefit of Sib. "This mock's been through the press once, and we take the first squott and the second squott together in doubling, if you follow me. A squott be a pressful of the mock straight from the mill; but after it has been squeezed once it do fill a smaller compass, and two squotts go to a doubling."

Philip Wonnacott and Tim Blake were filling the cloths and packing them neatly in the frame used for that purpose. Tim handled the "sclum" or fork, and broke up the sweet brown masses of

mock fine again for the second crushing, as a man might break ground with a spade. He then scooped it up and placed it in the horsehair cloths, where, first with his naked fists and then with a heavy spade, the man Wonnacott beat it down hard and firm into the cloth and frame. When the pile was complete, and a square mass of apple pulp neatly packed in horsehair awaited the press, a peg was drawn out, a brace of chains unloosed, and instantly the huge head of the monster descended by its own weight and settled heavily upon the fruit below. It sank with a growl and grumble, and the bright steel of the screw shone as it spun round. Tim Blake flooded the "dish" or floor of the press with cider, and Philip, with a broom, swept the channels clean. A heavy, thick scent of fruit was in the air; the faces of the men shone, the eyes of Mary Gilbert grew bright, for this was the stage she loved: that following upon packing of the press.

"Now the apples be going to give up their souls," she said to Sibella. "The dust of them will soon be all that's left after the third crushing."

The juice came rippling from the dish to the granite trough. The black horsehair began to glitter with moisture; beads and bubbles broke out upon its layers; then little spouts and trickles of liquid burst forth, until the oaken dish ran over, and a steady increasing flow of turbid juice fell to the trough with a babble of sound like a brook. The woman watched, and joined her hands with a sort of quiet inner rapture before this familiar rite.

"The sweetness they 've drawn from the sun and the earth, the life lived on tree-top, the mellow goodness garnered up on dewy nights, and at song of birds singing in the rain; the elements all doing their proper part to make 'em perfect," she said, but scarcely for any listener.

"One might say that you shared their lives so much as a shepherd shares the lives of his sheep, ma'am," declared Mr. Bridle. "The Mother of the Apples, old maister used to call 'e, an' so you be. The secrets of the trees ban't hidden from you, an' their good an' their evil is your good an' evil. You know, like a holy prophet, when temperature 's below dew-point of a night,

an' the sun 'pon your cheek in a May dawn tells how quick he 's warming the hearts of the young blossoms an' getting the better of the nightly frosts. Ess, you 'm the Mother of the Apples —leastways, of the apple-trees,—an' our orchards have done you credit this year, for never I seed no braver crop in the South Hams."

A great lever had been inserted into the press. It was of solid ash, and upon it many names of those who had laboured through past cider-making seasons were cut by the vanished hands. It dated back twenty years, and first among the inscriptions came that graven there by Richard's father when the lever was new.

Tim Blake pulled Sibella's sleeve, and pointed to a name freshly set upon the wood with the date of the previous year.

"'Tis Mark," murmured Tim. "You see, he was accounted strongest man as ever handled that there gert beam. An' I axed un why for he didn't put down his name along' with the rest of us, an' he laughed his gert deep-chested laugh, like a horse neighing, an' said as he 'd do so this year. He died two months agone. Auld bull at Truscott's got un

in a corner for all his gert strength an' horched un something cruel. So I 've cut his name there, begging pardon from everybody, I 'm sure, to be a sign an' token till Domesday that Mark worked along wi' us last year."

Only a fitful rise and fall of words broke in upon the rhythmic pulses of repeated sounds. There was hard breathing of men at the lever; regular clink, clink of a catch in a cog-wheel while toilers strained at the great beam and crushed down the mock inch by inch into smaller space; the lap and chuckle of the cider rippling from the dish to the trough.

At each turn of the screw the little river of apple-juice ran clearer and brighter.

"'Tis the same with humans, I judge," said Mrs. Gilbert. "Tighter the pinch, clearer comes the character of the man."

Mr. Newte dipped a horn mug and drank of the juice sparingly. Then he sniffed the air—heavy and sweet as honey, marked the sweating men with the brown mock spattered about them, sat him down upon a barrel and addressed the company.

"My friends," he said, "apples are very much

like human beings—no, not another drop, Mr. Wonnacott; it acts too sharply upon the system taken in this way. I 'll have a sip of old cider from your runlet presently. Apples, as I say, are like men and women. For some you 've got to squeeze before you know what they are made of; some you can tell by looking at their faces whether they are sweet or sour; and some you can't tell before you taste. Oh, my friends, let us carry our characters in our faces, like the honest 'Tom Putts'; let it not be said of us that we gave any man a soul-ache, that he came to us for nourishment or for sympathy, that he found sourness when he had a right to look for sweetness."

"'Twas a apple what Eve gived to Adam, by all accounts, Maister," ventured Tim Blake. "I s'pose 'tweern't no little auld scrubbly cider-apple as grawed theer, but a brave, sweet sort for the table? Else the man wouldn't have gived way to her. Though God knaws I doan't judge un. I be such a cruel hungerer for 'em that if I 'd got a wife an' her fetched along a gude, sizable, sweet apple in the heat of the day, I 'd be sartain sure to have ate un, clothes or no clothes."

"More shame to you," said Mr. Bridle.

"'Tis enough to make the Lard wish he'd never created no humans at all, when a grown man tells that wickedness, I'm sure," put in Abel Easterbrook, the cellar-man, who dropped in from the cider-racking hard by. He was very old and bald, and blinked always at broad day, for his work mostly lay in candle-lighted gloom.

"Not so, Abel Easterbrook," declared Mr. Bridle. "To say that be to say that the Almighty should have gived awver His work 'pon the fifth day instead of the sixth. 'Tis dictating to Him, and a very bowldacious act. Not that Tim Blake be in the right—far from it. All the same, a worm might so soon quarrel with my boot as you say what the Lard wishes or what He don't wish."

Mr. Newte spoke.

"Poor creatures!" he said. "Poor Adam and Eve. First they dressed the garden—then they had to think about dressing themselves. It all comes back to one thing. If they had only minded their own business, which was to keep Paradise clear of weeds, then——"

Mrs. Gilbert had been watching the cider flow. Now it slowly ceased.

"Wonnacott, Easterbrook," she said; "come—there's a time and place for everything, and this is the time and place for making cider, not making fun of the Holy Bible. Good-morning, Mr. Newte; I'll thank you to lift yourself off that barrel, for the trough's nigh full, and we need it."

"We stand corrected," said the pastor, "more especially myself. You have refreshed me, ma'am, and invigorated me, cooled me, quenched my thirst. I thank you—I do more: I bless you; and I bless your harvest. May a thousand thirsty throats be gladdened by this sweet vintage. May it strengthen and refresh, delight the hearts, satisfy the stomachs, and keep out of the heads of those who drink it. For myself, Mrs. Gilbert, I have abandoned the harmless, necessary duties of a travelling huckster. Henceforth the jewels I hold up to view will not be jewels of silver or jewels of gold, but eternal gems—the reward of the godly and the faithful—priceless, yet to be had for the asking. I design, God helping, to convert Lower Marldon. I have already converted

Farmer Cloberry; I have also converted his barn—into a very seemly and orderly little place of worship, capable of containing eighty souls and bodies. Into the chinks between the adults, children of varying ages may be inserted. Do not say you cannot come because of the children. There is always room for the children. Farewell."

Mr. Newte paddled away through the apple-trees. The great press was turned yet again, and now the lever had to be chained to a windlass and dragged back by four strong pairs of hands as the strain increased.

The trough had filled, and the muddy red cider, only paler in tone than the earth from which it came, was poured off into small barrels and passed forward where Abel Easterbrook moved amid his strainers, funnels, and rows of huge casks. The hive hummed again upon Mr. Newte's departure. Bridle superintended a fresh load of fruit now brought up for the breaker; Richard and his lady passed out from the dark and heavy-scented pounding-house to the freshness and sweetness of the orchard; Mrs. Gilbert stood in her old position and watched the men at work. She had forgotten Sibella's

troubles for the time being; yet her thoughts were with the girl, though her eyes were upon the cider press.

In her mind she speculated as to what fashion of tree should be planted in the orchard by Sibella upon her wedding-day.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GREAT DISCOVERY.

AS Lower Marldon had prophesied, Mr. Hatherley proved quite unequal to the trust reposed in him, and ten days after Sibella had departed from Compton Castle it became necessary to find a new custodian for the ruin.

Crab had a week in which to collect his goods and disappear; but he pretended to take his dismissal ill, though it chimed exactly with his own plans, and spent much time to poor purpose at the "Unicorn," where he dealt out strong language with freedom and vigour, and spread an opinion concerning Sir Archer Baskerville's character very far from the truth.

It may be noted that Richard, on behalf of Sibella, now clamoured loudly for his sweetheart's money; and Crab, after many evasions, had promised to surrender it upon the morning of his departure. Towards the last days of his tenancy, in an hour

less bemused than usual, the old man bethought him of his few possessions, and ascended to his bed-chamber in the old roof of Compton that he might inspect his goods and see exactly the nature of those garments collected in his old oak chest.

There, at the top, was the coat he had worn during the day of the auction; and from the pocket of it stuck forth Sibella's long-sought documents. Supposing these to contain no more than the particulars of her maternal relations, Crab cast them aside, and proceeded with his preparations for a secret decampment; but that night, alone in the dwelling-room, he recollected the papers, and presently spread them out for his private entertainment. Though no penman, he could read well enough, and now he scanned various pages of blue foolscap set out in a bold and flowing hand. There were, in addition to this statement, certain other attestations, signed and sealed; and the old man passed from indifference to interest, from interest to frantic excitement, as he gradually mastered the nature of these communications.

By the time that he had finished it was nearly midnight; but he did not sleep or attempt to do

so. He even forgot to go on drinking; and finally, upon the stroke of twelve o'clock, he came to a conclusion with himself, put on his hat, buttoned all the papers under his coat, and marched off into the village.

Great peace and silence reigned therein, broken only by Mr. Hatherley's own voice; for he talked to himself, and heaped insult and curse upon the individual to whom he was hastening.

"Auld viper that he be! I'd so soon trust the Dowl; but theer ban't none else for me to rely upon, as I knaw. He've brains in his wicked poll —an' I haven't, worse luck, so I must go along to un; though Heaven knaws the man be sure to strike a cruel hard bargain. I'm allus put upon—damn it—all along of havin' no eggication. Knaw he must, cuss the slimy twoad; but if he tries to best me or get more 'n his share, I'll smash his skull in like a rotten egg—God 's my witness, I will.'

Needless to say these reflections concerned Mr. Newte, and presently Crab stood at the pastor's door and woke the nocturnal echoes. Alpheus was asleep, for he retired early as a rule; but the din quickly wakened him, and presently, in the

pale light of a risen but waning moon, he thrust forth his head. Gazing upward, old Hatherley saw a dumpling under a red extinguisher, and knew it for Mr. Newte in his nightcap.

"What is this?" cried the good man. "What lost sheep is bleating at this unreasonable hour? Speak. Is anybody ill? Does any sick or suffering person need me? Here I am then; and I may remark that Parson Baring is reported never to leave his bed for any parishioner—but it is not so with me. I——"

"Don't jaw," said the man below. "Come down-house an' open the door. I be Joshua Hatherley, an' I've got a very important piece of news. I wouldn't never have brought it to you if there was anybody better. But I can trust you, because I can ruin you if I've a mind to; so open the door an' let me come in."

"The night has ears, even for a libel, friend Crab. Not so loud. Yet I believe you speak the truth, for something wholly out of the common must have arisen to keep you sober and standing on your feet after midnight. I'll come down at once. If it should happen that a great light has

shone upon you, that is only another proof that the power of Heaven overcomes all obstacles. Still, I 'm not in the least hopeful—not in the least."

Five minutes later Mr. Newte, with his trousers on, his braces fastened over his night-shirt, his nightcap nodding, and his fat feet cased in red felt slippers, sat below and scanned the papers. He read carefully and slowly while Crab, outside the narrow radius of light cast by one poor candle, smoked his pipe and growled to himself.

At length the pastor set down the last paper and spoke.

"Well, now, this is really the most remarkable thing that ever happened to me—by far the most remarkable."

"I found it out, mind that! There 's money in it—thousands I should think; an' that money 's mine. I only come to you because you 're a cunning chap, wi' more intellects than what I 've got. I 'll pay you for what you do; but I 'm master. If you 'll work it out right, I 'll give you a gude braave bit of money; if you doan't, I 'll smash every bone in your body, so now then!"

"What could be more definite? The charm of

speaking with you, Joshua Hatherley, lies in this: that never for an instant is it possible for the dullest intelligence to escape your meaning. Of words you have not many, but such as they are, you handle them like a master."

"Ban't no time for chattering. Will you run this through for me, or will you not?"

"Most certainly I will. We need not talk of money: you know how I hate the word. Of course it is a very desirable form of power. Who should know that better than I do? But when you have said that, you have said all you can in favour of it. In fact, a moiety and a half—not more, not a farthing more than a moiety and a half will I take, whatever may be the issue."

Mr. Hatherley looked at him suspiciously.

"What the hell's a moiety and a half? Never heard of no such thing," he said.

"A moiety and a half bears a certain proportion to the total—a proportion under the circumstances very modest, and quite equitable and just. But the question before me is this: how, for the greatest good of the community, can I best acquaint Sir Archer Baskerville with these amazing facts?"

"We'm out, him an' me. He've gived me the sack from Compton; an' I've told un what I thought of un in plain English?"

"Then his ears certainly tingled. Unfortunately he and I are also, as you put it, 'out.' He has not forgiven me in the matter of that little cabinet—a very unforgiving man, for all his sturdy support of the Church of England. But this must break down the barrier. Just consider what I am bringing him! Any ordinary being would fall upon my neck and weep, and welcome me as a messenger from the grave."

"He'll want them papers if I knaw him. Us have got to prove our words. Ban't no gude gwaine up to the 'Court' wi' no cock-an'-bull story. He must see them papers, and us must look out very sharp that he don't get 'em into his hands afore we've got the price of 'em. What be they worth? That's the question."

"Who shall say? He may set high store upon them and be generous, or he may regard the whole thing as a fraud and try to prove it one. So much depends upon Sir Archer's attitude. You see, a man's mind at threescore years and ten, or there-

abouts, has ceased to be elastic. We resent all signs and wonders, as a rule, when we get beyond the half-century. This will be a great shock—a revolution. The utmost tact and skill on my part are required. Upon my soul, if it were not for the obvious duty thrust upon me, I should feel inclined to refuse the task. These documents have quite bewildered me. Consider, then, how they will upset this Knight. We know to our cost, both of us, how little it takes to upset him. This thunderbolt, dropped out of a blue sky——"

"Read thicky papers again out loud, will 'e? His fust thought will be, 'tis a lie; but t'others, all signed so bold, an' covered wi' high lawyers' language an' oaths—they'll show un 'tis gospel truth."

"The facts are as follows," answered Mr. Newte. "They are startling enough, no doubt, from the lord of the manor's point of view, but it seems absolutely impossible to doubt them. Twenty-five years ago his only son ran away from the parental control and went to South Africa. About the same time your nephew, William Hatherley, your late sister's son, went also abroad. They met by

arrangement, for young Hatherley was the lad's groom and his friend from childhood. Despite his rank, the lad, Roger Godolphin Baskerville, made his friends of the people. And who shall blame him? So much we knew. We also knew that these men, young Baskerville and your nephew—who was a good many years older than his master—met abroad, and the relations of master and servant obtained between them. Now the sequel appears. The men both marry, and the wife of Roger Baskerville passes away in childbed, leaving one little daughter. Hatherley has no children, but at the wish of Mr. Baskerville consents to a curious imposture, and sends home to his old mother a child—Sibella. She is, however, Sibella Baskerville, not Sibella Hatherley at all."

"Always knawed she weern't our stock from the fust. Nature was strong in me, an' my bowels never yearned towards her one iotum. In fact, I hated the wench."

"The reason for her parent's extraordinary conduct appears in this document, written by him when he knew himself to be in danger of death. He disliked his father cordially, and he had no

wish to brighten the old man's life or gladden it with the present of an heiress to his property. He actually wanted him to live lonely and die lonely. But, nevertheless, he desired that his child, Sibella, should sooner or later come into her own. So he directed that these papers, telling her the truth about herself, should be handed to her when she came of age."

"That ban't yet for nigh two years."

"So much the better. Then nobody can accuse us of hiding from her what she ought to know. Here, in addition to this lucid statement, is a signed attestation from William Hatherley, explaining how his master died a week after setting down the truth. And, for the rest, we know that all the actors in the little drama were removed by death some few years afterwards. Your nephew and his wife both lost their lives in Africa, during a native rising that swept out of existence the little settlement where they continued to dwell after young Baskerville's death. That insurrection put back the hand of progress in Equatorial Africa. Probably, had he ever returned, William Hatherley might have been tempted to tell Sir Archer Basker-

ville the truth about Sibella; but Heaven saw fit to remove him."

"'Tis lucky us found this out in time, for the young fule be gwaine to marry Richard Gilbert afore Christmas. Think of that! What would Squire say to that? The son of his gert enemy! He'll never suffer that when he knaws; yet I 'most wish it could fall out so, if 'twas only to hurt Baskerville."

"Certainly not. No man will be more sad than myself to see their young loves nipped in the bud. But so it must be. The girl is translated; she has gone up with a merry noise to the sound of the lute and the pipe. My young friend Richard will have to look lower, and Miss Sibella, higher. To think that she might have been my wife at this moment but for a temporary error of judgment on her own part! What a world, Mr. Hatherley!"

"He'll flame, that young man. Damned if I ban't glad, if 'tis awnly to think how he'll smart when she's torn away from him."

"He will, no doubt. He will be very cross indeed; I'm positive of it. He may do something foolish—he may err. Even the youngest men

sometimes make mistakes. Well, well, these things are out of our hands; but Providence never forgets a good man's wrongs, though he may forget them himself. I bear no malice—I forgive, I forget; yet it seems pretty clear that Providence has not forgotten the way Richard Gilbert treated me last spring."

"When shall us go to Sir Archer?" interrupted Mr. Hatherley. "Them young things be gwaine to have theer banns axed out in a fortnight, so 'tis time we did somethin' soon."

"Quite right. These events call for instant action. Leave the first step to me. It is the first step that costs the brain tissue. I will set the ball rolling—in the name of right and justice I need hardly say."

"An' you 'll be content with a moiety and a half—not a farden more, so help you?"

"I swear it."

Mr. Hatherley rose doubtfully.

"I suppose to-morrow as you 'll be able to tell me what us had better do?" he asked.

"To-morrow we must act. To-night we must seek inspiration where alone we can expect to find it."

"I'm mortal thirsty, whether or no," declared Crab.

"Exactly," answered the other. "Your inspiration flows out of the spirit bottle; mine comes down like the rain from heaven, and angels whisper it to me in the night watches."

"Every man to his awn fancy then. An' as 'tis tu late to get a drink now, I'll thank you for summat. I'm like a roasting brick-kiln along of this business."

The pastor went to his little cupboard.

"I will join you—in a medicinal dose," he said, "for you have quite shaken my nerves. The world is always shaking my nerves. What a wonderfully interesting place it is to be sure—even as displayed here in the Marldons."

Crab chuckled.

"Ess fay," he answered; "an' us'll make it a sight more interesting still for a party here an' theer afore we've done with it. An' if auld Baskerville be miserly awver this job, theer may be others as won't be. Thousands — I tell 'e — thousands of pounds theer should be in this finding; an' they'm mine—every farden-piece but the moiety

an' a half for you. An' seein' as you be gwaine to treat me so honest an' bide content wi' a li'l bit, I dare say as I'll make it another five awver an' above your share if auld man pays real handsome."

"Don't let your natural generosity run away with you," said Mr. Newte. "There's always a temptation with a big nature like yours to err in that way. I want no more than my portion. Consciousness of well-doing is its own reward in this vale. Here's good luck to us all and the triumph of right!"

Mr. Hatherley drank deep, and the pastor's medicinal dose was also quite appreciable. They talked awhile longer; Crab took more brandy, and after the third glass grew affectionate and swore that he would trust Mr. Newte with his life. He also promised to attend the service at Farmer Cloberry's converted barn upon the following Sunday. Alpheus Newte, for his part, quoted the parable of the lost piece of silver and finally dismissed Mr. Hatherley, bidding him depart in peace.

But the old man left Sibella's documents behind him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRANSLATION OF SIBELLA.

WHILE she was busy with her dinner on the following day, Sibella heard a familiar voice, and going to the door of the cottage at Higher Marldon, where now she abode until her marriage, discovered Mr. Newte. He bid her a tender "Good-day," clasped her hand before she could prevent it, and declared himself so full of tremendous news that he hardly knew where or how to begin.

"I long to tell you myself—to play the Angel Raphael on this occasion and amaze you with glad tidings. But no; the temptation must be fought and conquered. It is not my place—the duty, the privilege of making this announcement belongs to another. I can only say that circumstances have transpired—that Heaven, in its own good time and for its own good purposes, has been busy on your

behalf; in fact, an enormous increase of happiness awaits you, Sibella."

"I know that already," she said; "I'm going to marry Richard five weeks from to-day."

"Man proposes and God disposes. Now, my child, you must put on your best frock and bonnet, make yourself as comely as possible, and follow me."

"Where to?"

"To no less a place than the ancient home of Sir Archer Baskerville. Open your eyes and look across the valley. There, in the trees—which, by the way, are allowed to grow much too near to the house for health—resides the great man, the great lonely lord of the manor. I have news for him too, wonderful news; but how he will take it remains to be seen. I shall have to speak with the tongues of fire to convince him; but, happily, there are documents. Men too often won't believe the inspired word, but they usually crumple up before a signed document; such virtue there is in sealing-wax."

"All this is Greek to me, Mr. Newte."

"So it must be; then come along as fast as you can and get it explained. A remarkable thing has

happened, Sibella, and your future is bound up in it. I 'll say no more; the rest depends upon Sir Archer Baskerville."

"I can expect no attention from him except for granny's sake."

"And that would be good reason enough."

"But Richard. When Sir Archer hears I am going to marry a Gilbert, even though he might have the power to do me good, he would never use it."

"True. That is probably the dark cloud. But, oh, my child, every cloud has a silver lining! I predict — however, I will not prophesy just at this moment. Get your hat and put on your best Sunday frock. It is imperative that you come with me to see Sir Archer at once, also that you make a good impression."

"Cannot I tell Richard first?"

"There is nothing to tell him yet, though probably he will have to hear some rather startling facts pretty soon. Now, ask no more questions, but put yourself in my hands. At least all persons are agreed that I am trustworthy, though they may or may not approve of my opinions."

Sibella, now in a state of hopeless bewilderment, left him and presently returned.

"It's all a dream, Mr. Newte," she said. "I shall waken by-and-by.

"You will, my dear; and when you do, remember thy servant Joseph—or I should say 'Alpheus.' Presently you will see the extent of the benefit I am able to confer upon you by the blessing of Providence; and then recollect that the rarest and the most beautiful of the virtues is gratitude. I don't want a statue or anything of that kind; I want gratitude—solid, tangible gratitude—four figures of it. I want a sort of recognition that I can put into the bank and suffer to accumulate for the benefit of the community. I may tell you that a very difficult duty lies immediately before me. If you look at my eyes you will observe that the rims of their eyelids are red. That is because I was awake all night—working for you—watching and praying, and so forth. Now I have to leave you here in some outer chamber of the Court while I have an interview with this great personage on your behalf. He is already my enemy, and my task will first be to assuage his wrath, then

gradually bring him into a reasonable and amiable frame of mind, and, finally, break the astounding intelligence that I speak of. That done I shall calm him, and speak the word in season, and lead him, as the shepherd leads the spring lamb, into a placid state of mind. We may drink a glass of wine together if Heaven gives me the mastery; and then, when he has been set aglow by my intelligence, and the pathos of the position is rendered more apparent through the mellowing influence of some old vintage—then I shall lead you into his presence, and leave you there alone. No eye must gaze upon that meeting; it will be sacred. Here we are. If I was a poet I should say the very trees know what we have come about. See how the oak and horse-chestnut cast down their treasures at your little feet as we walk up the avenue! And yet no premonition of the position appears in your face."

"Johnny Fortnight, how you chatter!" said the girl, laughing in spite of herself at his glib tongue and the solemn gestures of his fat arms as he waved them theatrically. "And what 'tis about I've not the dinkiest notion. I only wish

Dick was alongside of me to see me through it all; but he's never been between these gates, and never will come between them. Once, taking a message from grandmother to Sir Archer's housekeeper, I met Dick and asked him to come with me. But he said the old stone hippo-griffs—or whatever they are called that live on the pillars of the gate—would have come down and torn to pieces any Gilbert who dared to set foot on the Baskerville estate."

Now they stood at the door and Mr. Newte rang boldly, asked for Sir Archer, and marched into the hall before a man-servant could delay his progress. The sight of Sibella soothed the flunkey, for he knew her well enough; but of Mr. Newte he had heard nothing good, and felt very sure that his master would vigorously resent the pastor's intrusion.

"Best go out of this quicker 'n you came in," he said. "All you 'll be likely to get here is a horse-whipping. I 've heard Sir Archer maul you wi' his tongue something terrible."

Mr. Newte was about to reply, when the lord of the manor himself appeared. Amazement and anger

were in his face at sight of Alpheus. He leapt forward to fulfil the servant's prophecy, snatched a riding-whip from a rack and swore at his visitor.

"You here! You dare to cross *my* threshold, you oily rascal!"

"Peace be to this house; and don't lift your hand before a lady!" cried Mr. Newte. "I'm not here to insult you or trouble you in any way. I'm here about a matter vital to your dearest, deepest interests—God is my judge! Listen to me first, and horsewhip me afterwards—if you can find it in your grandfatherly heart to do so; but I feel sure you won't when you hear the amazing, the wonderful truth that it is my privilege to bring to you, Sir Archer Baskerville."

"Truth from you would be wonderful," answered the other, holding his hand at sight of Sibella's frightened face. "What do you bring this young woman here for, and how do you dare to come yourself? Say it in the fewest words. I hate to think such a canting scoundrel has been inside my doors a second time."

"I'm sorry; I'm sure I would as soon walk in the garden under Heaven's canopy; but birds have

ears as well as walls. We had better go into your study; I shan't do it any harm. I'm not poisonous —on my word of honour, I'm not. Meantime this maiden had better stop outside in the hall or another apartment."

"Wait here, Sibella," said Sir Archer, kindly, "and be sure you won't have to wait long. If you're fond of flowers, you can go across into the conservatory and see the chrysanthemums."

"'Solomon in all his glory was not attired like one of these,'" declared the pastor, looking at the great flowers hard by.

"If you quote Scripture again in my presence, I shall strike you," retorted the lord of the manor. "It is extremely offensive upon any glib tongue; upon yours it is loathsome. You laugh in your sleeve all the time, unctuous wretch that you are! Your lips don't, but your eyes do. You may cheat the common herd with your hypocrisy; you may even cheat yourself; but you won't deceive me."

They were now in Sir Archer's study, and Mr. Newte, without answering this last remark, asked a question:

"Shall I sit down, or would you prefer that I

should stand? I may observe that your attitude and your language to me would be very different if you knew what was in my pocket."

"A pistol, I daresay! I only wish there was, and that you would bring it out and point it at my head. Then I should have a handsome excuse for doing what I am itching to do."

"If I said that you were entertaining an angel unawares, it would probably annoy you," replied the pastor. "Therefore, I won't say it. I am here to ask you a strange question and divulge a startling secret. Providence, whose ways——"

"Leave that!" said Sir Archer, tightening his hold on the horsewhip.

"As you please. I was about to remark that Providence has brought to light an amazing circumstance, affecting you more nearly than anybody in the world. I am the tool; and Providence always chooses the right tool. Now, touching your son, Sir Archer——"

"Better do no such thing. I won't have his name upon your lips. I believe that he is dead and has answered for his folly."

"Roger Godolphin Baskerville is dead; but being

dead yet speaketh. I have in my pocket certain documents left to a certain person. Not to you, Sir Archer, though they will soon be yours; but to another, who is as yet ignorant of their deep importance. She has, in fact, never seen them, and believes that they are lost. Straight to my hand have they been brought, by one who is little better than an idiot. How true it is that the Lord's chosen fools often work wonders beyond the power of the cleverest of men! These documents attest strange things, and that you may realise there is nothing underhand here, no shadow of any falsehood, I will show you how much these papers have told me concerning matters that of course I did not know, but with which you are familiar. First then, your son departs without your permission, becomes engaged in mid-ocean, and marries the lady of his choice on reaching Africa. An orphan of Scotch extraction, it appears. Now, South Africa is not outside the pale of civilisation. A legal marriage is possible in that country. A certificate may be obtained. Your son, to be brief, was legally married at a little settlement of missionaries. Since then that settlement has been

swept away by the savages of those tropic lands, and the workers have won the martyr's crown. Their archives were utterly destroyed. The rest lies in a nutshell. God so often does His great deeds in a nutshell, and makes the mere atom a vehicle for wonders in the land of Ham. Now, the man William Hatherley, you remember. He went with your son, or soon afterwards; his dog-like fidelity commands our respect. It was thought that this person had a little girl—the same Sibella who is at this moment admiring your chrysanthemums. You start. Sibella is a family name of the Baskervilles, I have heard. Ah, my friend, read, read what I have here! I ought to ask a price first, and give you these precious documents afterwards; but I cannot do it. I too am a man, though not a grandfather. That word 'grandfather'! It gives a dignity to your grey hairs, Sir Archer; it adds an inch to your stature. Read, read! Sibella Hatherley is Sibella Baskerville —your grandchild, and as fair and blythe a maiden as ever bloomed from your noble stem!"

He spread a litter of papers upon the table and the knight, trembling with excitement, began aimlessly to grope among them.

"Here is a piece of my son's writing," he said. "This is true. I myself have looked at that girl and wondered what blood was in her veins."

"Wonder no longer, my dear and honoured sir, for your own flows there. You believe? Tell me that you believe, and I will depart. I shall tread on air. There is a beatific light upon your brow, Sir Archer; and I have the proud knowledge that I brought it there."

The other was deep in the papers; and Mr. Newte smiled at the horsewhip which had fallen to the ground.

"It is all of a piece. There can be no untruth. My son has written with his own hand."

"Written and dictated. He felt himself struck for death. His purpose—doubtless the malignant result of delirium or some horrible malarial fever—was to keep the maiden from you until she came of age. Then she was to receive these papers and be left free to decide her course of action. Mercifully the discovery was made by me in time. For within a month or so—in fact the child was on the threshold of marriage with an inferior. But Providence, if I may again

allude to it, has still some regard for the Upper Ten Thousand, thank God. Is it not that august body which has justified the ways of Providence to the masses? I think so; I have always believed so. We are in time at any rate—in time to save the heiress of the Baskervilles from marrying a cider-maker. You are going to thank me, Sir Archer; I see in your face that you are about to thank me."

"It may be that I have misjudged you, Mr. Newte. At least you have behaved in accordance with right and honesty in this matter."

"It is not the least part of such a great event from my point of view, Sir Archer, that it enables you to perceive me in a new and truer light. You will observe that I hand over these documents without any condition or stipulation whatsoever. They are Sibella Baskerville's, by the direction of her dead parent; yet, though I knew that they were hers, a strong hand pointed me to you rather than to her. I trust you think I did well."

"Yes—emphatically it was better that I should know this first."

"I will leave you then. I may observe that I have absolutely no claim upon you in this matter,

Such a sacred privilege seemed beyond any consideration of lucre. Yet, in justice to you who have recovered a granddaughter—a very beautiful and distinguished damsel, too—in justice to you, Sir Archer, and from a fear that you might remember this aspect of the case after I was gone, I mention it. You may think with me that money seems almost a blasphemy in such a connection, or, being a rich man, who knows the value of the precious metals better than I can, it may be that you will consider a certain sum might pass between us without offence. Candidly I don't know; I should like your judgment on that delicate question."

"It is all I can do for you."

"Not so, Sir Archer. I have your thanks; you have honoured me by shaking my hand; my heart is full. Money will be less to me than the memory of this occasion. I may say, indeed, that five thousand pounds would weigh very lightly in the balance against the memory of your delight to-day."

"You are a very diplomatic man, Mr. Newte."

"My dear Sir Archer, naked came I into the world, and naked shall I go out of it again; but in the meantime, during my progress through this

impecunious vale and on behalf of the community—— You see a sum like that at 4 per cent.—not 5—positively I cannot believe in 5—at 4—represents—yes, two hundred a year. Removed thus from the necessity of—— But now I 'll go. I know what is in your mind. Who can know it better? Your grand-daughter is here; she has absolutely no inkling of these beautiful and pathetic facts. Break it to her gently, Sir Archer—a very highly-strung, sensitive lady,—and, now I look at you, positively your eyes and hers—how singular—like little pieces of the same blue heaven! She is still under the impression that she recently lost a grandmother; and it is your pleasant duty to explain to her that she has found a grandfather instead. Farewell! When you are satisfied of the story which these papers set forth—all under duly legal and properly attested documents,—you will remember Alpheus Newte—his residence, the dwelling of Widow Truscott at Lower Marldon."

Mr. Newte bowed down and swept with no little stateliness from the library. A minute later he had sent Sibella to her grandfather and himself departed homewards.

CHAPTER XV.

FOR DICK.

SIR ARCHER BASKERVILLE sat without moving when his granddaughter appeared. His eyes were on her face, busy to find mark and remembrance of her father; and then his mind roved from Sibella away to the announcement of that hour and the fact of the papers on the table. He reflected that his son had purposely desired the girl to remain in humbleness and poverty until her twenty-first year. His passionate nature grew angry with the dead, for was it not Sir Archer who had lost most, suffered most? The knowledge of a granddaughter had doubtless diminished the knight's anxieties and regrets through many years; yet this great circumstance his son had deliberately concealed from him. He reflected also that in the event of his death, the estates and possessions must have passed away to another branch of the family, and he pictured the trouble

and confusion consequent on such a situation when Sibella should come of age and learn the truth.

Then he forgot everything but the girl, and his heart grew soft and went out to her, and hungered towards her. Here was a new object for life, a centre of hope, a fellow-creature sprung from himself. He found his voice unequal to speech for a moment; then he bid Sibella be seated, and called her attention to the papers on the table.

"Here are great matters, my child," he said gently. "They concern you—and me also. I have only just learned the purport of them. Of course you can read? Then do so, and read most carefully. I will wait your time."

Sibella's eye had caught sight of a superscription. It was blurred and time-stained somewhat, for it had been set upon the outside of the packet. But within all the documents were fresh and clean, as though written but yesterday.

"These are mine, Sir Archer!" she cried. "Oh, what a precious sight to me! My dear father's words——"

"And in part your father's writing—yes, Sibella. They were to be secret until you came of age.

That, however, is no longer necessary. I have yet to learn exactly how and where the manuscripts were found by Mr. Newte. But it is a blessing, indeed, that he did find them. Don't be nervous or ill at ease. You 'll quickly understand the position when you have read what lies there."

The girl hesitated, and felt her heart flutter, but she showed no emotion.

"All this is such a great mystery to me," she said. "I will read what my father wrote for me. I will be very quick, Sir Archer."

"Go to the fire, my child. Surprise and doubt sometimes make us cold for the moment. There, sit there and take your time. You won't faint or anything of that sort, I very well know. No Baskerville women ever do."

She stared and was going to speak, when he stopped her, put his hands upon her shoulders, and pressed her into a big easy-chair beside the hearth.

"Not a word until you have read all there is to read, or, at least, all that is vital. There appears a possibility of error here, but it is very remote. Indeed, I have no doubt in my own mind, for my heart has decided the question. A man's heart

speaks the truth to him in such great rare moments as this day has brought to me."

Sibella looked with round, wonder-stricken eyes, but did not speak; then her grandfather pointed to the papers in her lap, and she bowed her head and began to read.

There was a silence while the girl studied, and Sir Archer walked up and down beside the window with his eyes on her face. The truth then reached her, and she read no more, but dropped the manuscripts in a heap, and rose up and stood dreaming of this amazing surprise. It seemed to the old man watching her that she had grown an inch or two. He wondered how this news appealed to her, and tried to realise the emotions of one in humble life thus suddenly exalted. But none born to greatness can guess the tenor of a mind thus confronted with it. Sir Archer imagined the girl's horizons widening—widening till the very earth beneath her feet perhaps felt unstable; he supposed that she was oppressed with such a splendid reality; he approached and looked into her face and fancied that pride of birth was already born there. To his sight her shapely head poised differently upon her

shoulders, and the joy of finding herself a Baskerville touched her little red mouth into a new curve never seen there before.

He watched fondly and built up this patchwork of errors as he watched. In reality, Sibella's thoughts had flown from the actual event with unerring directness to the vital point ahead of her. No pride was in her heart; no particular joy marked the moment, for a great anxiety already began to cloud down upon her, and all her mind was occupied with Richard Gilbert. Like lightning her thoughts traversed the position; then she saw the old face near her, and, moved by sudden inspiration, approached him, put her arms round her grandfather's neck and kissed him. No words had better answered the purpose. The spontaneous action woke all that was best in this lonely soul, and fires of a genial glow, long smothered under the ashes of vanity and futile temper, woke to life again.

"God bless my son's daughter—God bless the little girl who has come to brighten up the grey winter of my old life! There is a kind Father in Heaven, child—an All-seeing One who works in His own good time and by His own mysterious

ways. I cannot tell you quite what this discovery means to me. My life has not been very happy. I was not wise enough to seek the things that mattered when I was young, and a great disappointment clouded my days—a great wrong, rather—a wrong I did not commit, but suffered. The thing I wanted most was taken from me—stolen away,—but that life-long injury need not trouble you. Let it suffice that, concerning your father, I had forgiven him—from my heart forgiven him for disobeying me. And I loved him again before he died; and I love the memory of him now, though he willed to keep you from me all these years, and so did you a wrong and me a wrong. I forgive him that too. Heaven willed it, and now Heaven permits that we make up for lost time. This story cannot be hidden. Here it is set down beyond possibility of doubt, as I believe. I am thankful that your mother was a well-born, though a lonely and friendless girl. The little community where your father and she dwelt has passed away; the church in which they joined hands has vanished now; for God permitted the heathen to triumph there, and after the event the

good man who married your parents was slain and his little mission-station burned to the ground. It is strange, yet it may be true that the lion again walks unchallenged where you were born, Sibella. But here are all the proofs necessary. The truth about you is there in those precious papers. Kiss me again, granddaughter, and say that you are glad to be my granddaughter."

"I am very glad, because you are glad, Sir Archer," she answered. "And when 'tis borne in upon my mind I shall be yet more glad, but I 'm all in a maze to think such things can be. I can't understand yet. And through it all—oh, there 's a terrible side too! To think yourself one girl for eighteen years, and then suddenly find you was another!"

"You 'were' another. Poor little maiden! Yes, I have got to realise this wonderful thing as well as you; and I doubt but that it will take my old, cut-and-dried, crystallised mind longer far than your young, elastic one. To be all alone in the world for more years than you have lived yet—to have none near and dear—and then suddenly, dropped out of the sky—from Heaven as I do most

honestly and religiously believe—there comes into my life a little one, to be son and daughter both to me. And you shall make me young again—young in your youth. Can you face a new life with me, Sibella?"

"I was on the threshold of a new life when this wonderful thing happened, Sir Archer," she answered sedately.

"Why, yes, of course. Your early days passed at Compton. How happy that you should have moved there—a fit place for a disguised princess—a home of noble spirits that have long gone to their rest. You knew the history more or less, I suppose? Did you learn it like a parrot, or did you think about it?"

"I often thought about it, indeed."

"Have you been educated—in a general way, my child?"

"I know nothing, Sir Archer, except how to read and write."

"Then you must begin your lessons by learning to love, Sibella."

"That needs no lessons, sir," she said.

"To love me—to love me. I am very desirous

of it. I want to see your eye brighter for the sight of me. I want to find out how I shall quickest make you love me."

Their eyes met, and he saw her thought shadowed, and read, not what he yearned for, but the old, primal love of a maid for a man. She too perceived by the altered expression of his features that he had gleaned something from her dreaming, uplifted face; and she felt that the point of difficulty and danger was reached. Even in that supreme moment her wonder grew at her own calmness and control. Then the old man held out his hands to her and smiled, and her self-possession vanished, for it seemed that he thought the rising cloud might be smiled away, whereas Sibella knew well enough that it held the substance of her life. His next words confirmed her fears.

"Nothing must come between us, child. The humblest, simplest little life puts out his roots, I suppose, even as the wild flower; but when we transplant a white violet to be queen of our garden, the small thing cannot but feel the wrench. You understand. I don't want my flower to forget all who have been good to her in her cottage garden;

I bless their unknown names; but now—it is different. Life suddenly opens out for you; you are beautiful to see; you are a Baskerville—the heiress of the Baskervilles. Such a position has its obligations. Tell me that you do not fear them. Tell me that you are prepared to face the toil of education, the trouble of this great transplanting, the worry of an old grandfather who will be jealous presently of the ground your shadow cools. Can you begin to understand? Or is it too soon? I want to be first in your love, because I am the nearest. We have both been very lonely—though, please God, my loneliness you will never know. Now we have found each other."

"I love you already, grandfather."

"Then I am content. But there is a word to be spoken yet. I see trouble in your face and thoughts about a matter not yet broken between us. Speak your whole heart to me. Tell me all that is in it."

"I am engaged to be married, grandfather."

"Why, so the man Newte said; and Providence was kind there, too. You might have been a wife already. When the poor little white violet is

plucked, some roots and suckers here and there may have to part, and the ground that nourished it will mourn it for a while. I 'm full of sympathy for you already, Sibella; more, I heartily sympathise with the young man too, whomsoever he may be. I shall be generous; trust me for that; we will heal his wound handsomely."

The girl started and her lips parted a little.

"Can you speak so of a man who loves a woman, grandfather?"

"I can speak so of a worthy young farmer and apple-grower who loves Sibella Baskerville," he answered.

"Yet, Sibella Baskerville is not more or less than Sib Hatherley. If I was indeed a princess, the man I have promised to marry would be too good for me."

"If you think so, then it is time your education began in earnest, young lady," said Sir Archer, and a little of the emotion died out of his voice as he drew himself up and glanced over the mantelpiece at a picture of a maternal ancestor by Lely. "You have yet to learn all that is meant by 'heiress of the Marldons.' Cider is good; it seems reasonable

that there should be intelligent and capable men amongst us who still make a study of the apple and succeed in producing a marketable beverage from its fruit. But a cideriſt is not the husband for my granddaughter, and my granddaughter must grasp that elemental fact as a prelude to her education."

"Your granddaughter will never grasp the fact that she must not marry the man she has promised to marry, Sir Archer."

"Well, well, do not let us labour that point. The cider-maker will probably understand it more quickly than I can expect you to yet."

"Richard Gilbert is master of his own land, as you are, sir. His family is——"

She broke off, for the old man fell away from her. His straight back bent, he groped with his hand for support until it crooked over the back of a high chair; then, with an expression from which benevolence had vanished, he answered:

"That man of all others—the son of Gregory Gilbert and of——! Call back your words, Sibella. You say this to try me because you knew—to tempt me into anger. Not a Gilbert; you have never loved Mary Gilbert's son?"

"He is good and honest, and holds himself of high estate, grandfather."

"Do not call me grandfather again while you call him lover! You insult me; you paint the whole picture of the past in fresh, crude colours that burn. You—my son's child, and he—her son. My God! after all these years, after the shameful thing had grown a little dim and only tormented me when the wind of thought set in one quarter. Now, now!——"

"If I am a Baskerville, it is well that I should act as becomes them, sir."

"You are no Baskerville unless I will it!" he cried. "That is your sole right and title to the high name —there, a bundle of papers. I throw them upon the fire and burn them and you with them, headstrong fool of a girl! Would a Baskerville think twice before such an error? You loved in the dark. Who is going to blame you? There are others to think of beside yourself. Am I of no account—your grandfather, your lawful guardian and controller? Where is the love for me you professed a moment since?"

"I love Richard Gilbert dearly. We are tokened.

I have promised him to be his wife. Is that promise less binding because I am your granddaughter, Sir Archer?"

"Emphatically it is. Had you come home as an infant to me, this promise would never have been made. There can be no shadow of obligation anywhere. We are faced with the necessity of obliterating all the various side-issues sprung from the mistaken theory that you were a peasant's daughter; and this, as being the most serious, we will take first. You cannot marry Richard Gilbert because you are Sibella Baskerville."

"Yet you would have married his mother, sir."

"No more of that," he said, his anger wrinkling his face. "It ill becomes you to dare—— That is a subject upon which none has a right to breathe one word, and none has ever presumed to do so. Be silent upon it for ever if you covet love of mine."

"You are not just, Sir Archer, and I cannot love you," she said sadly. "May not I say the one word that might show you how much you wrong me—you, who know what love is, and whose life has been clouded and ruined through it? Why do you wish me to suffer as you have suffered?"

"Be silent, I say, or leave my presence! To dare to dispute with your grandfather! Prove yourself dutiful, girl, or go your way and let this interview be as a dream. You must choose—that is all the matter. Shall an old, wise man argue with his grandchild? Ten thousand times ten thousand arguments would be vain, even if I listened to them. If he had been one who mended the roads I might have yielded; but he is Richard Gilbert. There is nothing more to say—nothing. Be Sibella Baskerville, heiress of the Marldons and my granddaughter, or be what you were when you awoke this morning. I will give you five minutes to choose."

He turned his back upon her and strode up and down, his eyes upon the window.

Sibella made no oral reply; but she had answered decisively enough by the time the knight turned round again. She, too, lacked not the temper of her house; her sense of right was bruised by her grandfather's rough speech, and it stung her to instant, cruel retort. As Sir Archer turned, his eyes noted a great flame upon the hearth, and he perceived the fateful papers, crisping and curling, all ablaze beyond possibility of rescue.

Sibella was already near the study door.

"I have chosen," she said quietly. "I'll be neither Sib Hatherley nor yet Sibella Baskerville, but just Mrs. Richard Gilbert, because I've given my word so to be, and because I am proud to be. I cannot live without my Dick. Your servant to command, Sir Archer."

She curtsied gravely in the pretty ancient fashion, and was gone before her grandfather could speak. Then the old man surveyed the smouldering wreck of the great hope kindled but an hour before, and sank down into his chair, and seemed to shrink there, even as the blue papers, now withered to brown, shrank upon the hearth. He looked around him, half rose to reach the bell, then fell back again, pressed his hands close over his face, and so remained a long while without any movement.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN RALEGH'S TOWER.

THROUGH the deep lanes under gathering twilight Sibella hastened, and set her face towards Compton Castle. What sudden desire prompted her to seek Crab Hatherley at this great pass in her life she could not afterwards explain; but so it was, and now, full of her experience and still in a frame of mind quite powerless to realise the significance of her hasty deed, she wandered in waning light where autumn's courts had stood but were no more. The silver seed of clematis still covered the high hedges and fell in festoons and clusters over the hazels and thorns; here and there flamed out a maple, though each breath scattered its dwindling splendours; in the gloaming the royal purple of the dog-wood looked almost black within the hedges, and the spindle-tree, that stood like a burning bush under the twilight, thrust orange-coloured seeds through the split cases of its pink fruit. Among

those flowers that still struggled to live in the sere, down-beaten desolation of dead rack, a rosy wild basil still blossomed feebly, and sturdy campions opened their shining stars, and wood strawberries bloomed trustfully out of the glimmering mosses. There was a heavy smell of fungus and decaying leaves in the air, a fine sunset reddened the fading colours of the leaves that still held on, and the robins sang.

In a field beside the way the last of the mangel-wurzels were being gathered, and men, bending low, plodded along with a rhythmic swing and recurrent harmonious action proper to their work. Simultaneously in each hand they pulled up two roots from earth, then jerked their wrists, so that the great turnips fell shorn of all greenery. The roots dropped together, the leaves were also thrown down, and behind each labourer extended long regular lines—one of mangels awaiting the cart, one of the shining foliage. Thus generations have perfected each simple manual task upon the land, and the wisdom of assemblies could not hit a happier or speedier fashion of drawing turnips than that arrived at by the wisdom of the fields. Men boast

themselves of their dexterity in this sort, and you shall find the folk wholesomely proud of their powers at cider-press or in rick-yard, jealous of fame won upon the furrow behind the plough, of reputation achieved with sheep-shears or bill-hook. Such a spirit ennobles labour, and lifts the humblest necessary toil above meanness.

Sibella Baskerville proceeded with her wild thoughts and the sunset light upon her face. She gloried in the thing that she had done. Her soul rose against this adamantine and ancient heart that could cherish false wrongs for so many years, that could seek to punish a child for the unreasonableness of its grandfather. She told herself that this old man was mad to make such cruel stipulations; she breathed again as one who had escaped by mercy from a threatened peril. Then, growing calmer in the cool evening air, she perceived that many persons ignorant of what love meant might blame her for an idiotic sacrifice. She considered how that policy had temporised with such a problem and not thrust a splendid possibility into the first fire that offered to destroy it. Regret, however, she was quite incapable of

feeling, for Sibella's nature was too large, her love too true, primitive, whole-hearted, to be anything less than the mainspring of life. She felt no sense of heroism in this sacrifice; she did not stop to appraise her deed; her only moment of hesitation came before the thought that Richard's future might have been more blessed as the husband of a Baskerville; but she swept that reflection away with a breath, for as a Baskerville, Sir Archer had distinctly said she should not marry a Gilbert. Sibella naturally determined that her sweetheart must never know of the incident; and by the time she reached Compton Castle her ideas had undergone a further change, and her object in coming no longer existed. But the girl held on her way, found Mr. Hatherley at home, and stayed a few moments to speak with him.

Crab, as may be supposed, was in a condition of great suppressed excitement. He had been drinking tolerably hard and counting rainbow gold since his interview with Alpheus Newte; therefore this unexpected visit from Sibella loosened his tongue, and she discovered from his first words that he knew the secret of the papers.

Mr. Hatherley was chopping a log of wood to mend his fire, that he might boil a kettle, when Sibella appeared. He stopped instantly and advanced with eager eyes. A scent of spirits was heavy about him, and he had not shaved for a week. The girl noted the familiar spectacle, but did not observe a jerky and abrupt manner, a blank and rolling eye, and a curious twitching about the old man's limbs. These signs had warned one familiar with crapulence that Nature's powers were nearly exhausted and a storm was threatening.

"Evening to 'e, Miss Baskerville," he said. "So they papers as was lost an' found again held a proper dollop of news! I found 'em; I discovered who you was. Did Newte tell you that?"

"No, he didn't, Mr. Hatherley."

Crab's forehead wrinkled down over his eyebrows, and he scratched the bald surface of his head.

"God rot 'un! I don't trust 'un; I 'most wish I 'd gone to you, but you never cared for me. Blast the world!—come to think of it, nobody do care for me; an' me so poor an' so auld."

"I'm sure I was always good to you, Mr. Hatherley, when I thought I was your relation."

"And now—now you knaw you ban't. You 'll mind that I was a gude uncle to 'e. You 'll not be backward to reward a poor auld chap, will 'e? Sir Archer will pay handsome if he 's the gentleman us all thinks him; but Newte 's got a finger in that pie because I 'm not eggicated, an' my head hurts if I think tu long about all this mystery an' how to act for the best. God knaws I awnly want to do my duty by everybody. An' you—you, my little Sib, as I have dandled in these here hands, and filled 'e wi' bread-an'-milk till you was so plump as a Christmas rabbit—you 'll be generous to the auld chap, won't 'e? 'Twas my care an' forethought as saved the dockyments; 'tis me, not that blackbeetle Newte, as you 've got to thank for your salvation."

"I 'm glad I came, since you understand all about it," she said, calmly. "But, knowing the papers were mine, you should have given them to me and nobody else, Mr. Hatherley."

He eyed her with suspicion.

"'Twas for your gude, lovey. I read 'em, 'cause I thought if theer was anything bad in 'em as might hurt your soft heart, I 'd burn 'em an' spare you a sorrow; then, when I found how you was the

darter of his lordship's son, I felt 'twas tu gert a matter to put in your tender 'ands. Newte swore solemn awnly to take a moiety an' a half; but he 've got the cunning of the sarpent whether or no, an' if he plays me false again—why, I 'll wring his fat neck like a capon, an' watch 'un put out his lying tongue an' turn purple, an' kick out his life onder my hands!"

"'Again,' Mr. Hatherley? Has Mr. Newte done you a wrong before?"

"Why, that thousand pound," began Crab, with righteous wrath; then, even through his bemuddled understanding, there shot a ray of light. It was clearly impossible to tell the story of Gammer Hatherley's thousand pounds to Sibella. "'Tis done—an auld story—an' I try to forget and forgive them as wrong me; but you—you, miss—for I must call 'e miss an' touch my forehead to 'e henceforrard—you won't forget what I 've done for 'e, and how I 've lifted up your head in the land and made a great lady of 'e? You won't forget poor auld Joshua, will 'e?"

"I 'm never likely to forget you, or this day," said Sibella. "You 'll naturally be anxious to hear

what has happened. After my dinner I went with Mr. Newte to the Court. First he saw Sir Archer, and then I did. What happened between Mr. Newte and my grandfather I do not know; but I can tell you what happened when I saw him."

She related the incidents of the afternoon, and as the dusk gathered in, failed to notice the effect of her information until it burst from the disappointed man.

"With the burning of those papers," she concluded, "my short spell as Miss Sibella Baskerville came to an end. They cannot be replaced, because they were copies of registers kept in a little foreign church somewhere, and it has been burnt down and destroyed by savages, in the middle of Africa. So I am Sib Hatherley again, I suppose—until I am Sib Gilbert."

"God in Heaven!" roared the old man, "you sit there like a stone image and tell me this! You 'll settle the future of grown men; you 'll fling my hard-won reward into the gutter, to feed your own paltry cranks and fancies! All gone; all burnt in the fire by a fool—my thousands and thousands of pounds. Then I 'll take payment from you!

There's hands pointing all around you, and eyes winking, and black tongues wagging betwixt red-hot lips; and they sez, 'Take your payment from her what have ruined 'e!' An' so I will, you cursed, curd-faced she-devil!"

He started to his feet, swayed unsteadily a moment, then recovered himself and picked up his wood-chopper.

"You'm doomed for death!" he cried. "I'll kill you; I'll stretch you out a corpse for your blasted man to find; I'll brain you and hide you in the dungeon down under wheer the rats' ll have theer way with 'e, and gnaw your wicked cat's heart out of 'e. You, as won't be a Baskerville, shall damn soon be nought but flesh an' bones!"

He moved towards her, round a table that happily separated them, and Sib edged away until the door was at her back. Then she darted through it, hoping to escape to the main entrance, where her fleetness of foot would soon serve to distance the old man. But the main door in the castle's front was shut, with a huge beam for bolt, and Sibella knew from experience that to open it took more time than her enemy would grant. She

turned sharply, therefore, avoided the delirious old savage behind by a few yards only, and dashed down a stone passage-way into the open courtyard. From here was one egress only—that which pierced the western wall. Up to this led those shallow fern-clad steps where Sibella had sat with Mr. Newte; and once through the door at the top of them she had been safe enough, for in the wide garden outspread beyond, her pursuer must have lost her in darkness; while easy escape lay through the orchard lands. Here, however, as ill chance decreed, the door in the wall was shut, and, desiring no brutal death upon the altar of that quaint and ancient stairway, the girl rushed round and round the courtyard, and screamed for aid as she did so. But Crab Hatherley's wit saved his heels. He knew that Sibella was now powerless to escape from him unless help came, and so, stopping, he picked up a heavy stone and hurled it at her, hoping thus to maim the unfortunate girl and bring her within reach of his heavy weapon. The great stone flew wide, and Sibella, alarmed in earnest now that she realised her terrible danger, turned giddy for a moment, and clutched the

ivy-clad wall behind her. She strung herself to renewed action in time, for his second missile bruised her shoulder; and then she fled like a trapped creature round and round the walls before him and finally ran into the huge, ancient kitchen, whose yawning chimney stretched clean across one side of the chamber. From here through the adjacent buttery Sibella fled, and then hurried up a winding staircase that communicated with ruined rooms above. Cracked laughter echoed after her, like hoarse joy of a ghoul, for now the old drunkard below had his victim safe enough. Her only escape from Ralegh's Tower must be by death. Up the steep stair she hastened, saw one ruddy gleam above the tree-tops as she passed a broken cross-bow window, and then reached a perishing and dilapidated apartment that was full of dust, cobwebs and dry rot aflame in the dying sunset. This spot tradition specially associated with the hero whose name the tower bore; and creeping to the chimney of it, Sibella pressed against a buttress and tried to hide there. Now she kept silent as death, and the only sound was a hoarse snorting in the turret as Crab clambered

aloft. But the way was dark and the man anything but steady upon his legs. Sibella crept closer into the gloom of the chimney; then a bat, startled by her action, flickered suddenly out and dashed for the doorway just as Mr. Hatherley's ugly face and grinning teeth appeared in it. The creature went past his ear, and he started backward; his foot slipped, his hand was wrenched from the granite lintel, and he vanished. There resounded a tremendous crash, followed by two voices uplifted in loud expressions of wrath and cries of pain. But the groan that reached Sibella's ears out of the silence that succeeded her enemy's downfall did not come from the throat of Crab Hatherley. Two men lay below, one with a broken leg, the other quite unconscious but uninjured, save for a flesh-wound in his thigh where he had fallen upon his own bill-hook.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PROPHECY.

AFTER leaving Sibella with her grandfather, Mr. Newte ambled home to his cottage in a most contented frame of mind. Sir Archer had proved even more reasonable than the pastor expected, and results appeared both certain and satisfactory. That Sibella would upset his hopes was quite the last thing deemed likely in the mind of Alpheus; indeed, a possibility of any difference between the heiress of the Baskervilles and the head of her family had not entered his calculations. His thoughts as he returned to Lower Marldon were otherwise occupied. Again he pictured the dramatic position had Sibella accepted his own offer of hand and heart; and from that vision he turned to the reality of Richard Gilbert. Mr. Newte had already determined to take no step in that matter and leave the young man's dismissal to Sibella,

when Richard himself appeared from a turnip-field that was being portioned out for sheep, and accompanied Alpheus towards Lower Marldon.

Upon this accident Mr. Newte changed his mind, and from motives frankly benevolent decided to mention the great matter of the day. By so doing he trusted that a painful but necessary ordeal might be anticipated for Sibella, and a little robbed of its sting from young Gilbert's standpoint.

"Good-evening, Richard," he said. "I perceive that you have been setting up hurdles with your own hand. Good exercise for a strong young back, and nothing to be ashamed of, believe me."

"I reckon not. 'Tis the farmers who are ashamed of their work that fail."

"Very true—a noble calling. Our first parent may be described as a farmer in a small way—hardly, however, a 'gentleman-farmer' as we understand that ridiculous term. But from a line of agricultural ancestors dating back to Adam—if you could find the links—you come."

"As to that, if I could find the links, as you say, I should find some pretty big people between me and Adam, I believe. They laugh, but some

day perhaps I'll prove it. My father always held that proof only wanted patient seeking. Meantime we're yeomen and well thought of back to Charles the Second or thereabout."

"That is far enough. You have an honourable record—good men married to good women of their own station in life. A man's a fool to look above him or below him for his partner. The truly wise never wed out of their class."

"I suppose they don't."

"Never. Consider the difficulties. Imagine, for instance, that you were engaged to a woman of fortune—an heiress of high birth."

"I can't imagine such folly."

"Richard, stand still and listen. A great trial awaits you—no less than the shattering of all your plans and projects for happiness."

Gilbert stopped as he was bid.

"What devil's trick are you up to now? If you mean Sibella, or anything to do with her, I'll break your neck!"

"Once more assault and battery threatened against me—twice within a day. Quite romantic I'm sure. But you mighty soon grow weary of such romance

if you 're over fifty years old. In fact it shatters the nerves. I do mean Sibella; and you mustn't break my neck, because I have no voice in the matter. Briefly, Sibella had a father and a mother. Who were they?"

"You know as well as I do."

"I know a great deal better than you do. Alas! my dear Dick, we are on the brink of a sad tragedy here. I did not mean to seek you. I had proposed to leave it to Sibella, for it is no business of mine. But Providence willed that we should meet while my mind was seething with this great affair. I have in fact just come from seeing Sir Archer Baskerville?"

"What's all this rigmarole to me?"

"It's vital to you. Your Sibella—yours no longer—has been lifted up, exalted, raised above all our heads. The truth has come to light. Those mysterious papers that were lost are found again; they have been through my hands."

"They were Sibella's."

"She is probably studying them at this moment. It is easily conceivable that she is sitting with her mouth and her eyes wide open before the astounding

information that they will convey to her. She was not the daughter of William Hatherley, but the daughter of his master, Roger Baskerville, got in lawful wedlock. She is in fact Sibella Baskerville, heiress of Sir Archer."

"It's a lie!"

"It is as true as anything I have heard for years. The written word remains. We have documents—priceless in that they cannot be replaced. They attest the fact beyond the least possibility of doubt. Hatherley fathered her at the wish of her real father. She is at this moment in the presence of her grandparent. These things you must know—the sooner the better. Her duty is of course quite transparent. Greater than she have had to smother their young heart's love. That the girl will suffer acutely we both of us can believe. It must, however, rest with you to make her task as easy as possible. I really do feel for you more than I can put into words. You have been very rude to me on several occasions. Yet, such is the spirit that guides my life, that now I can sympathise with you in your tribulations. I shall pray for you to-night. There is only

one course open, and that is to anticipate Sibella and give her up like a man. 'With an auspicious and a dropping eye,' as Shakespeare says, I tell you these things. I am sorry for you, but glad for the girl, and quite resigned for my own part."

"Your part? You said your part was nothing."

"I erred. As the humble instrument I have my measure of responsibility. The documents concerning this remarkable matter were put into my hands last night by that local ruffian, Crab Hatherley. He but dimly guessed the significance of them; I, on the contrary, sat up all night with them—with them and my Bible."

"And made a hard bargain this morning, I'll swear."

"Why swear? Don't be bitter about it. I made a bargain very much the reverse of hard. In fact, with a sort of native timidity before my betters—a sort of humility entirely to my credit—I left it to Sir Archer himself. I have reason to believe he will treat me with justice, but not generosity; a thousand pounds or so is likely to be the figure."

"How has Sibella taken this?"

"I cannot tell you. Wisely, be sure. Never did I meet a young woman with such natural ability and good sense. I believe these gifts to be most uncommon in her exalted class of life."

"A Baskerville! That of all things!"

"It has its dramatic significance. Here is your mother. Why, she seems a part of this spacious orchard, as I always say—haunts it like some spirit of old time. Place this sad, startling event before her, and learn what she thinks, Richard."

The other did not answer, and together they approached Mary Gilbert where she stood in thought alone under the apple-trees. A misty golden light winnowed from the western sky, and the woman occupied a little clearing in the midst of it. Beside her reclined an ancient tree already mentioned. It had been broken down in the gale of the preceding winter; yet under these maimed conditions the ruin had obeyed Nature, budded, blossomed and borne.

"Good-evening, Dame Gilbert," said Mr. Newte, bowing and taking off his hat. "You stand here a guardian of these venerable and moss-grown

trunks. What a lesson at your elbow! Crushed to earth, yet not conquered—a patriarchal 'Tom Putt' is it, or a 'buff coat'?"

"The tree must go. I want its room, Richard. 'Tis here that Sibella shall set up her sapling the day that she comes to us," answered Mrs. Gilbert.

Her son laughed bitterly, and she quickly perceived that he was in deep distress of mind. Paying no attention to Mr. Newte, his mother approached Dick and lifted her placid eyes to his face with a question. But Richard left it to Alpheus.

"Ask him," he said; "he'll tell you. 'Tisn't his fault this awful thing has happened, and yet I hate him, for never a man brought worse news to another, and did it more as if he liked it."

Now this was not the case, and Mr. Newte felt hurt. He sighed and shook his head, then, with less circumlocution than was habitual to him, retraced the great discovery, and told how Sibella had been left with Sir Archer Baskerville to hear first from the knight himself the true story of her parentage.

Mrs. Gilbert listened with evident wonder, but

made no comment when the pastor ceased speaking. Instead, she turned to Richard, and put her hand upon his shoulder where he sat on the fallen tree flogging his leggings with a hazel-switch.

"Speak, mother," he said. "Surely now 's no time for silence. 'Tis a strange terrible thing. I can't measure it all. Is it to be fatal to me? Something says 'twill be; yet something hopes against hope. I loved her with all my soul, an' she loved me the same way. Must I give her up? Say it if I must."

"In these overpowering cases, conscience has a painful habit of speaking to us with a trumpet voice," began Mr. Newte, but Richard cut him short.

"I ask my mother, not you. I 've had enough of your trumpet voice for one day, anyway."

"Couldn't do better, lad; for nobody 's likely to understand the height and depth of this event better than your parent," retorted the pastor imperturbed.

Then there was a silence until the woman broke it. She spoke with her face turned to Compton Castle.

"'Tis the lot of few to be faced with such a mighty thing. And but short time allowed to make up her young mind in, if I know her grandfather. To think of him before this coil!"

"But think of me, mother."

"Your part's the hardest, Richard, for 'tis a case where the man's part is what a man always finds hardest: to do nought at a great moment. You've got to look on and see the girl make up her mind. I'm sorry for you, my son, but Sibella must decide."

"You make a dummy of me!" he burst out. "Don't you know me better than to suppose I would—would let her take me now, even if I had the power to? She's a Baskerville, and the poison will begin to work in her veins as soon as she knows it. Anyway, I'm a man, and I'm not going to sleep on this. And, come what may, it's my place to smooth the road for her."

"My own idea put in words not so well chosen as mine," murmured Mr. Newte.

"She will decide, and nothing you can say or do will alter her decision," repeated Richard's mother. "I know women, and I know this young one and

the stock she springs from. Your salvation may lie in the fact that she 's a Baskerville, for with all their faults, they never change."

"D'you think I 'd marry her now? D'you think if she went upon her knees to me I would do this thing? My love for Sibella 's the most unselfish love in the world. Gilberts have some strength of will, I believe, as well as Baskervilles. What would you say, and what would you think of me, if I stood between Sibella and her lawful inheritance?"

"Her inheritance is in the hand of Almighty God," said Mary Gilbert. "You can't stand between her and that. She 's a free agent, and she 'll go the way her heart tells her. You don't know the nature of a woman's love. You 've promised to marry her, and, if she keeps you to that promise, who are you to turn back from it?"

Mr. Newte's opinion of Mrs. Gilbert, as a woman of sense, underwent instantaneous change upon this utterance.

"The doctrine of free will doesn't meet the case, if I may speak," he said. "For once I 'm bound to say I think that my young friend is right and his

mother is wrong. Would you trade upon a maiden love—an attachment beautiful enough and real enough, I grant, but, nevertheless, a thing entered into upon a wrong basis—upon a total misapprehension of the facts? When you 're dealing with a suddenly-revealed and unsuspected truth, surely you must see that the case is altered? Sibella Baskerville would not be justified in keeping her promise any more than Richard would be justified in asking her to do so."

"As to that," said Mrs. Gilbert, "oil is as good as vinegar, and the Gilberts are worthy mates for Baskervilles so far as blood goes. But the case so stands between me and Archer Baskerville, that he would rather see this new-found granddaughter in her coffin than married to any son of mine. Therefore the question of fitness or unfitness does not rise. Sibella must decide. You may storm and flog your temper into a whirlwind, Richard Gilbert, but Sibella Baskerville will marry you if she chooses, or will abandon you if she finds herself of that mind."

"Not if I can prevent it. I never heard you speak so much and to such poor purpose, mother.

My brain's on fire. Oh, my words strangle one another in coming out! To think that you—you, my own mother—should believe a Gilbert no stronger than that. Picture me passing the Court! Think of me, when this man dies and another rules over the lands that Sibella should have had; and every blade of grass would stab her great surrender into me. You'll drive me mad if you say again that the decision rests with her. I'll prove you're wrong. God's my judge that I'll prove you're utterly wrong before I sleep to-night."

"I know you better than you know yourself, Dick," retorted his mother calmly; "and I know Sibella better than you know her. 'Tis your love, not hers, that's turned into poison while you can talk that way."

"He's too proud to marry any woman better off than himself, ma'am—too proud and too much a man. I honour him for his candour," declared Alpheus Newte.

"He's speaking away from the book of his heart," she answered. "This thunder-storm will pass. For my part, lands and houses and great riches be all dust in the balance against a well-deep, lasting love.

I know—I that speak to you. I had to make my choice forty years ago, even as Sib has now. Was my husband, Gregory Gilbert, any the less a man because he took me at my word and gived me what I wanted best in the world—himself?"

"But the cases are by no means parallel," ventured Mr. Newte. If I may speak——"

"Speech is vain. The girl will decide, and so all's said. Ay! fly off," she added, surveying Richard as he strode away with a mind distraught. "Go to her—that's the wisest thing you can do. You'll not take it from a mother. What son would, belike? But go to her, and hear the voice of her, and look into the eyes of her. Then my young lion will be a sucking dove again, and he'll come home knowing one scrap more of what's in women."

She watched her son depart, and her eyes were soft, and a sort of grave smile hovered about her mouth.

"I am shattered," said Mr. Newte as silence fell. "I am mentally shattered to find such a sensible person as yourself, Mrs. Gilbert, taking such a deplorable, fairy-tale sort of view of this

problem. One who usually can see the point of an affair so clearly, too."

"'Tis just a simple question of what their young love is worth," she answered. "Great possessions can't keep a man and maid apart if they'm of a mind. I know the fibre that goes to true love; and this girl's ways and manner of thought have told me all about her. Richard's a man, and has to learn the meaning of the word, for you males get to the end of your lives, so often as not, without knowing true love at all. But my son be lucky, for now he'm bound to see what love means to a maid of the olden sort. He might never have known the greatness of what this girl feels for him—now he will."

"I hope rather that he will ascertain the greatness of her common-sense and self-control, ma'am. I really trust that she will have the wisdom to perceive that she owes a dead father something, to make no mention of a live grandfather."

"Not ghosts nor yet grandfathers have power to drag up a true-planted love by the roots. You don't know, because you're outside and never was inside, if I can read you. Only take what you feel

deepest about; what's closest to the mainspring of your being, Alpheus Newte. Whether 'tis God or gold you alone know best; but take it and multiply it ten million times, and ten million more, and ten million to that; then you 'll see figures that be not a half or a hundred part of the love a real woman can feel for a man."

"Though the mathematics have always been a delight to me, Mrs. Gilbert, I never yet got into millions; and as for the mainspring of my being, it can't really be made a matter of figures. I and my Maker both know that perfectly well. But as to human love, really so much has been said on the subject that, at this date, I don't know that anything of importance can be added."

"Not by you, I'm very sure. But all living things that have felt it can add something, if 'tis only a man's sigh or a maid's song. Go your way, there's a good soul, and leave this riddle to answer itself. You won't be asked to play judge between 'em, nor yet shall I. They 'll do what's in them to do without help or hindrance from outside."

"You say so, Mrs. Gilbert. Well, we shall see.

The young are hasty. Sometimes a word in season——"

She made no answer, and Mr. Newte departed in some anxiety. He confessed to himself that the possibility of Sibella acting like a fool had not occurred to him; but the more he reflected upon such an event the less likely it appeared, and he was nearly at peace again by the time he reached his home.

Meanwhile Dick, in a highly tragical frame of mind, took a short cut for Higher Marldon and the temporary home of Sibella. His way led by good chance along the outer walls of Compton Castle, and so it happened that he had not passed out of earshot from the pile when Sibella's scream for help awakened the drowsy dusk. Richard stopped in this stride, but waited only for a repetition of the frantic cry to change his road and take the nearest way to the castle. Through the outer orchard he raced; then into the garden; and finally down the ferny steps his sweetheart's feet had approached but a minute before. Now he heard the cry above him in Ralegh's Tower, and he knew the voice that uttered it. Then

young Gilbert rushed to the ruined wing of the fabric, crossed the great kitchen and dashed headlong up the staircase beyond it. But here his career was roughly cut short, for a body twice his own weight fell headlong upon top of him, and beneath the heavy carcase of Crab Hatherley, Dick was swept backwards and crushed to the ground with a broken leg.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOVE AND ASHES.

TWO days after the catastrophe at Compton Castle, Sibella came to see her wounded hero, and found him in bed under the care of his mother. The broken limb was prospering well; but Dick's condition of mind proved not favourable to a speedy cure, and, suspecting that there was no real reason for his downcast state, Mrs. Gilbert asked her son's sweetheart to visit him. This Sibella, who had only waited the mandate, gladly consented to do, and we find her now at an early hour beside Dick's bed in an upper chamber of Orchard Farm facing upon the west. Without, the apple-trees were nearly naked, for the sure south-west wind proper to that season had blown fiercely through four-and-twenty hours. But he was now resting for a space, and had ceased in a mild and mellow dawn.

Sibella bent over Dick and kissed him, then

waited for him to speak. This, however, he did not immediately do. For a long while he kept his eyes upon the window; then he turned them to her and spoke wearily:

"I hope you are none the worse for your fright, Sibella Baskerville?"

She started, but paid no heed to the new name.

"None the worse, I am glad to say, dear Richard. But that is thanks to you; you saved my life."

He growled:

"Nothing of the sort; I saved Crab Hatherley's. The brute would have broken his neck if I had not been there for him to fall upon."

"It was very unfortunate—for you, dearest. The poor wretch certainly meant to kill me."

"And yet I hear you decline to say anything, or explain the reason that made him so frantic."

"Only his avarice and greediness. He fancied that I was going to turn into a pixie made of gold; and he found that he was mistaken. Now tell me about yourself, dear Dick. Have you been tortured terribly? Can you sleep? Are you out of pain?"

"My leg's nothing; but a man can't have his

life turned upside down without getting a bit sleepless. 'Twill come right."

"Your life is unchanged surely, Richard? What has happened, beyond this accident, that you say your life has been turned upside down?"

"You ask that? D'you think we're all deaf and dumb and blind here? And even if we were, that brute of a Newte is eyes and ears and tongue for a hundred people. He came to me red-hot with all this cursed business about you. You're Sir Archer Baskerville's granddaughter; and yet you can ask me if my life has turned upside down!"

"Even if I was, Dick, 'tis my life surely, not yours, that is changed. You're Richard Gilbert still; and you told me you loved me within this week. That at least holds true, I suppose?"

"Love can't change. I would alter if I could, but that's impossible."

"'Alter if you could,' Richard! What do you mean?"

She regarded him with genuine amazement, while he, sick and suffering, made short answer:

"Don't stare so. Don't pretend you don't understand. If the poison hasn't begun to work yet, it

will. You 're a Baskerville, aren't you? How could a Baskerville marry a Gilbert?"

"I don't see any impossibility, Richard. Because Sir Archer wanted to marry your mother, and your mother chose rather to marry somebody else, is that any reason why this mad quarrel should be kept up between the families?"

"Perhaps not, but it exists. They began it. The blame is entirely Sir Archer's."

"Yes, that is true."

"And the fact cannot be changed by us; so we must face it. You must try and forget me, Sibella."

"You can say that to me after all the dear past days! You can lie there and say that, and your cruel voice not even shake!"

"I'm not cruel, God knows. A man looks all round a question; a woman so often only sees the heart side of it. Don't call me 'cruel,' Sib. Think what this means to me. Think what my life's worth with you taken out of it."

"I won't go out of it—never—never—unless you drive me out!"

"You must go out! I don't mean to marry you, and I wouldn't—not if you went down on your

knees and prayed me to. If you don't realise a little of what it costs me to say that terrible thing to you, Sibella, I cannot help it. I only know that it has taken twenty years off my life to say it."

"But why have you said it? Because you will not marry a Baskerville?"

"That will serve for a reason as well as another."

"Your love is a very poor and paltry thing, then, Richard Gilbert."

"Say so if you like, and think so if you can."

"What else am I to think?"

"It is not for me to point that out. I desire to make your road easy and spare you every pang of pain in my power."

"Pain doesn't matter now," she said. "You have hurt me worse to-day than I can ever be hurt again. 'To make my road easy'! I thought my road was yours till death parted us. You think to make my road easy by going off it and leaving me to walk alone?"

"Not alone: with a grandfather."

"And you are to be the martyr and I—— Let me go!"

"Listen a moment before you leave me. I'm

not a great hand at blowing my own trumpet, only my patience doesn't reach as far as this. One would think I was a double-dyed rascal who wanted to give you up, and had taken this occasion to break with you, instead of—of—well, of course I can't explain to you what my life will be lived alone, because it will be alone if it is not spent with you. Be just at least, before we separate for ever. Consider your grandfather."

"That's just exactly what I didn't do," she said, hotly. "'Tis a great pity the cases were not reversed, I think, if you can be so very thoughtful for him. What's the love worth a grandfather can kill? I believed I knew you, Richard—how little I knew!"

"You needn't say bitter things to me. I suppose a grown man sees further into a millstone like this than a girl can."

"Perhaps, and sticks his stupid eyes in it, instead of looking clean through out on to the other side. You're so instructive to-day, that I'll ask for a little more information. What would you have done?"

"A man's different. I should have told the old

gentleman that I was engaged to be married, and that mountains wouldn't change me. Then, if he had kicked——"

"Yes, then?"

"I'd have burned the damned papers and kept my liberty at any cost."

"Ah, of course only a man could do such a big, heroic thing. A poor, weak girl would sink into her grandfather's arms, and say, between her sobs, that her lover might go and drown himself—wouldn't she?"

"No occasion to mention the lover. Let him drop out of the matter."

"And you think I did that?"

"No, I don't; else you wouldn't be here now."

"Look here, Richard; d'you see those marks?"

She showed him a big wheal that crossed her palm and two fingers.

"Yes, you've burned yourself; I'm very sorry."

"The finger a wedding ring might have gone upon some day suffered most. And would you be sorry to hear, too, that I had burned myself altogether—to a heap of dust and cinders? Would you be glad or grieved to know that there wasn't so much

as a letter of my name left to swear by? But of course 'a man's different' Only a bold hero like Richard Gilbert could make a bonfire of himself."

"Sibella!"

"Not Sibella to you! I'm Miss Baskerville now; and the poison has begun to work; and I wouldn't marry you, Mr. Richard Gilbert, if you went down on both knees—which, of course, you can't do till they've mended you."

"Sib! You burnt the papers!"

"They were mine to do what I pleased with. But it's all one now. I couldn't help the truth happening because nobody consulted me before I was born; but I can help the result of it, and I have. Sir Archer put it plainly—to choose between you or him. I couldn't have both; now—now I'll have neither. No, I won't—don't stretch out your arms to me. A Baskerville I can never be proved, and a Gilbert I will never be made—never—never—never."

Yet within two minutes of that tremendous declaration Sibella was shedding tears, and Richard kissing them out of her eyes as fast as might be. He explained with great circumstance how that he

had determined to give her up for her own dear sake, and elaborated his sufferings between outbursts of enthusiasm at her courage and heroism. An hour of rosy mutual adoration passed in one mere flutter of Love's wing; then in upon them came Mrs. Gilbert, and she said no word, but just looked into her son's eyes.

"Yes, mother; I know; you were right, as you always are right. Sibella's been the greatest heroine out of history, and she is going to marry me."

"The sooner the better," said the girl; "for I'm a mere nameless thing now. Most uncomfortable it is. I'm not a Hatherley, and nobody can say I'm a Baskerville, for the papers that proved it are no more and they cannot be renewed."

Mrs. Gilbert heard the story, with all particulars of Sibella's visit to Sir Archer and the girl's decision. Whereupon she kissed her and spoke briefly:

"I knew that this would end right, my dear, though I hoped that it would end right differently. Perhaps that was not possible. 'Tis a grave thing you've done—nothing for a loving woman—but grave looked at from other points."

At this moment yet another appeared upon the

scene, and Mr. Newte thrust in his round and florid face. His eyes twinkled, and he beamed from habit.

"The serving-maid denied me," he said, "but I swept her from my path in the name of Righteousness. Where the sufferer tosses on his uneasy couch, there shall be found Alpheus Newte."

"I don't want you," said Richard abruptly. "I'm sick of you. Your voice is sticky, like oil, and you always mean some sort of trouble for me whenever we meet."

"If I can be of no service to you, Richard, then you can be of service to me. And you, Miss Baskerville. I have been seeking you for eight-and-forty hours. I have already thanked Heaven for your miraculous escape. You will understand that I am deeply interested in your welfare—a welfare of which, under Providence, I may be considered the direct instrument. If it is not asking too much, I should greatly like to know how we all stand. Your interview with your grandfather is sacred. I would not dare to pry into such a matter. But the result naturally demands to be made public. By the way, I rejoice with exceeding great joy to find you here, for that would seem to show that Sir

Archer is, after all, not impervious to the dictates of humanity. To sanction such an end to your fairy story was worthy of a great man. But I never thought he would have risen to it."

"He didn't, Mr. Newte. I am sorry for your sake, because no doubt you had something to gain, and you meant well. But my grandfather and I could not agree, so I took a short, simple course. I really think he was very sorry that I did, and I was very, very sorry to make an old, lonely man sad. Still it had to be. I burnt the papers and freed Sir Archer of myself and all the responsibilities I represented."

"Burnt the documents!"

"Every one of them. They were mine, remember."

"True, they were yours. Now I perfectly understand why the man Crab Hatherley had a fit and tried to do you harm. I visited him yesterday. He was suffering from an attack of *delirium tremens* consequent on his downfall. He mistook me for—no matter. But he did not tell me this. Indeed he did no more than babble I left him dangerously ill. One might almost

marvel without irreverence that he is permitted to linger amongst us. A bad man — methodically, systematically, hopelessly bad. However, there is One that judgeth."

But Mrs. Gilbert had later news of Joshua Hatherley than that possessed by the pastor.

"He's better to-day," she said. "Mr. Bridle has seen him; he keeps asking for a policeman."

"He would have been wiser to send for me surely?"

"I don't know. 'Twas concerning you that he wanted a constable."

"Poor distraught soul!"

Mrs. Gilbert reflected a moment, then spoke.

"Maybe you ought to know; maybe you ought not. Yet I'll give you the benefit of the doubt, and tell you, Mr. Newte. To be plain, Hatherley has got a great story against you. It goes back to the sale of his sister's things at Compton Castle after her death. You mind that old piece of furniture?"

"Let me see—the Sheraton cabinet? Yes, yes, of course. My difference with Sir Archer. I remember it only too well."

"Hatherley says there was a thousand pounds hid in that cabinet, and you knew it and foxed most of the money away from him by a trick. He says he can prove that you paid him out of that money, and that he has still got over two hundred at the castle, and that you have the rest hidden."

"The demon of drink!" said Mr. Newte. "Let this be a lesson to the oldest and youngest of us. What appalling depths liquor will lead a man into!"

"If that money existed, it was yours, Sibella!" cried Richard; but Mr. Newte took no notice and pursued his own reflections.

"To think that perhaps a man's last act on earth should be to hatch a lie against his best friend! However, leave this to me. Say nothing. I should be sad to find such a wicked scandal creeping amongst those who are learning to love me here."

"I 'll say nothing. Right will prevail," answered Mrs. Gilbert.

"Be sure that honesty is the best policy—always," continued Alpheus. "I ought to know, for in the far past I was myself unregenerate. In fact I have tried every sort of policy, in the course of a career

that might be very interesting, if it was written down without prejudice. Now I must go—bitterly disappointed. I confess I am disappointed. You will see it on my face."

"I'm sorry if by burning the papers I have robbed you or Mr. Hatherley," said Sibella; "and I'm sure I never will believe that you have robbed me."

"Yet the heavens are sustained," replied Mr. Newte, rather vaguely, "and the righteous man is not called upon to beg for a living. Farewell! There are several things that must be done before I break bread. Happily the day is still young."

He disappeared, and Richard took Mrs. Gilbert to task.

"Mother, why did you tell him? Such a look came into his face—like a hundred weasels rolled into one. Perhaps it is true. Perhaps there was money there—Sib's own; for poor old Granny Hatherley often said that Sibella was to have all she had to give; and you remember that with her last breath she bid Sibella go to Newte. Yes! He's a robber; I feel it in my bones."

"Then he will pay the price, my dear; be sure of

that. But I didn't like to think there were plots hatching against him, and him ignorant of them."

"What do you say, Sib?" asked Richard.

"I was thinking how he took the news. He's got plenty of pluck. Another man would have been savage with me, like Mr. Hatherley was; for this probably means a big reward lost to Mr. Newte. Yet he hardly winced. He even smiled—a sort of fat, horrid, inward smile."

"He'll make a bolt now, see if he doesn't, and take your money with him," foretold Richard.

"For us the matter's over," declared his sweetheart, "and thankful am I that it is so. All you've got to do, at any rate, Dick, is to get well again and marry me. That's quite simple and straightforward, without any double-dealing about it, I'm sure."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WISDOM OF MR. NEWTE.

ALPHEUS NEWTE considered that he was now faced with the master problem of his life; but he approached it fearlessly, for he held a strong lead in the game and a promising card, presently to be played. The future, indeed, did not rest upon him so much as another. With Sir Archer Baskerville it remained to decide whether the pastor should go upon his way rejoicing or the reverse. Crab Hatherley's affair obviously called for immediate attention, because at that moment, reposing within Mr. Newte's little desk at home, were Bank of England notes to the value of more than seven hundred pounds. The thought that these might be brought to light upon a search-warrant was painful enough; yet, even amidst his anxieties, Mr. Newte found leisure to be very grateful to Mrs. Gilbert. Though

now upon the brink of a grand and conclusive move, Alpheus nevertheless determined with himself to advance Mary Gilbert's prosperity if a chance should offer within the hour.

First proceeding to his cottage, he spent ten minutes to advantage among private papers; then, telling Mrs. Truscott, his landlady, that an urgent affair called him from home, and that he might be absent on a matter of well-doing until the following day, he set forth upon his business. But it was to Higher Marldon, not the abode of the shattered Joshua Hatherley at Compton Castle, that Mr. Newte first repaired. By noon he had reached his destination, and five minutes later, fortune favouring him, he was admitted to the presence of the lord of the manor.

Despite the fact that his mind was now pretty sharply set upon his own affairs, Alpheus did not fail to note an obvious change in the man before him. Sir Archer looked haggard and careworn; a lack of force marked his aspect, and life now appeared no more than a weariness to him.

"What do you want?" he asked, without moving

from the fire by which he sat, or turning his eyes from the burning coals whereon they were fixed.

"But a few of your valuable moments, Sir Archer. You will understand that I am deeply interested in recent events, especially as I was privileged to aid in bringing them about. May I ask, without impertinence, whether the young lady approached the standard that a maiden of your great name should reach?"

At another time such a question would have been answered by an instant explosion; but there was not any fight in the house of Baskerville just now, and Mr. Newte divined it.

"I have little doubt that she was my son's child," the old man answered, listlessly. "Her actions were such as one might have predicted from a daughter of Roger Baskerville. I only regret that I did not foresee them and take steps to prevent them."

"She burned the documents, I understand?"

"She did, when my back was turned—wayward, wicked girl!"

"What misguided spirit, Sir Archer."

"It proved, if that wanted further proof, that she was what the documents declared."

"How mad these young things are! And the papers destroyed! Still, you know the truth. Is not that enough?"

"It might be for me, but not for the legal heirs of my property. You won't get my nephews to believe this story on my assurance. It's moonshine in law."

"The heirs are not likely to give way? I suppose not. The human mind is constitutionally incapable of being convinced against its own interests. To think any girl could commit such folly! This shows what it is to be uneducated, Sir Archer; and I daresay if she had but endured to listen, that a little quiet conversation, a little logic and reason from you, would have found a way to smooth every difficulty."

"I am all logic and reason," said the knight. "My worst enemies concede as much. She, however, would listen to neither. The first point that rose she was instantly beside herself. A true Baskerville—near as beautiful as her grandmother, had she been adequately dressed. And a mind

that only requires proper instruction to be quite as large as need be wished for a woman. It is a very great blow to me. It has aged me terribly. She might have made a fair and soft autumn and winter for my grey hairs. I loved her at sight; but she is cruel. It is a Baskerville trait."

"From which, however, you have entirely escaped, Sir Archer. May I ask what fatal thing could have come between you so terribly at this first meeting? They hinted at love."

"It's no business of yours that I can see. Still, you were the instrument, and have perhaps a sort of right to know. As a matter of fact she behaved like a headstrong little fool, and took my word too literally. My speech is always forcible, even hyperbolic. Sometimes I may mean more than I say; yet no man can ever accuse me of injustice, or declare that I do not always give a patient ear to reason. I am the soul of justice."

"Very true, indeed. Reason, however, is the last thing we expect from a young woman attached to a young man. There seems very little doubt that Miss Sibella's affection is deeply rooted."

Sir Archer did not speak for a moment, then he replied with some irritation:

"I don't want you to tell me how Baskervilles love. I should know that if any man does. The unreasonableness lay with her in deciding idiotically on the spur of the moment. These things want to be talked about and looked at from every side. My soul warmed to her, sir; I'm not ashamed to confess that I felt a great pulse and throb of rejoicing in my old heart at sight of that young girl. Her voice was most musical, her deportment distinguished. But fire and fury! how is one to come to any sort of understanding with such a tempestuous spirit? Still —still—most musical her voice even in anger. A fine carriage—how she swept out!"

"She burned her hand badly."

"Not as badly as she burned my heart. To think that an old man's last days of gladness should be at the mercy of the third generation! However, it is all over now; she has chosen. I shall see her no more."

"Pardon me, but I have an honest reason for asking, Sir Archer. Was it really a matter of final choice, or did she imagine that it was, because she

found herself too hot to listen to your words? I am given to understand that you placed before her a bare alternative between her grandfather on one side and a lover from the race of Gilbert on the other. Now, on hearing this, my first thought was that the young lady had wilfully or accidentally misunderstood the truth. I said, 'Surely Sir Archer, who is the soul of chivalry and knightly courtesy, whose heart is still young, who smiles upon our little ones and pats their little heads as he passes, and whose presence brightens every eye—surely he is not the man to crush out a young romance, a youthful first love, without good reason?' I said; 'it is far more likely that such a wise gentleman, with the experience of years behind him, should rather suggest a protracted and proper ordeal of the affections. The value of this maiden's love for another man may be best judged by the nature of her love and regard for her own noble grandfather. I should rather think,' I said to those interested in this matter, 'that Sir Archer, had Miss Sibella only been wise enough to listen to his wisdom, would have proposed some reasonable trial of patience, extending over a considerable period. Take my word for it, Mrs. Gilbert,' I said, 'you

deal with one whose mind ranges infinitely higher than mere matters of temporary expedience and feasibility. Sir Archer always looks ahead. He is the most far-seeing man you shall meet with in Devonshire. His decision would probably be that Sibella receives at least five years of a higher education under his own eyes. She must go abroad and see the world, and learn what it becomes her to know. She must expand, like the beautiful butterfly, from this chrysalis of print frocks and sunbonnets. She must prepare for her place in a lordly garden of pleasure. Five years hence,' I continued, 'Miss Sibella Baskerville will have reached the age of four-and-twenty—young enough, in all conscience, for her to make up her mind upon such a question as marriage. And, meantime, the youth Richard Gilbert's kinship with that ancient, illustrious family of Gilbert is quite capable of proof by the Heralds' College—for it is merely a question of pounds, shillings, and pence. But, as Paul says to Titus, let us "avoid foolish questions and genealogies . . . for they are unprofitable and vain." The youth Richard Gilbert,' I said, 'should instantly set about improving his mind,

strengthening his faculties, enlarging his horizon, and fitting himself for a more important position in life than that which his natural modesty had tempted him to rest content with.' These things I said to them, Sir Archer; it was thus that I endeavoured to hint to their understandings the nature of the man you were."

"Certainly you came not far short of my sentiments. I will give you that credit. And, if I may ask, what did these people say?"

"Mrs. Gilbert echoed my words. She, at least, has the wisdom of years. She is a stately and a noble woman. She has also been privileged to witness your life and take example by it, like the rest of her generation in the Marldons. As for the young people, needless to say they doubted me."

Silence followed Mr. Newte's report of this purely imaginary conversation; then the other spoke:

"You are not lacking in sense. As a matter of fact, I *was* going to say to my granddaughter almost exactly what you predicted to her. I have a heart. I loved the girl from the moment I set eyes on her."

"Nobody needs to be told that you have a heart, Sir Archer. I am proud to think that I saw a little of your goodness at a glance, and was able to foretell it. Five years—what are they? Barely time to let these young things grow from children into adults. And higher education opens a girl's eyes in a way that nothing else can."

"True; but I have a heart, I tell you. I do not think that I would have denied her in the long run. Life has taught me what it is to be denied myself. You make me see at least that—— But the matter is done with. We waste words as to what might have been. She has decided against me."

"I have reason to believe the young lady bitterly regrets her action. And now concerning my part, Sir Archer? I suppose that you do not consider me entitled to any reward under these sad circumstances?"

Sir Archer started at this blunt question.

"The idea had not occurred to me," he answered.

"Nor to me. My hope was burned to ashes with the documents; I only mention it."

"You did your best. If fifty pounds——"

"Sir Archer," began Mr. Newte, rising to his feet,

and thus theatrically adding to the value of the statement he was about to make. "Sir Archer Baskerville, wisdom is the great and only real magician in this world; and of wisdom, I may say without overstepping the bounds of modesty, it has pleased Providence to give me my share."

"Nevertheless your wisdom is vain, and your boasting is vain, unless you can renew ashes."

"My dear sir, supposing that we go back further than the ashes; supposing that the ashes were valueless all along, that the pearl of price still exists? Recollect that I came to you unarmed, defenceless, even as a lamb into a lion's den. Accident placed this great discovery in my keeping. As a man of the world, and one who wanted to leave the world better than he found it, I could not be blind to the value of those documents. I perceived that they might represent to me a sum large enough to do some practical and far-reaching good to the community. So, what did I do? You will remember remarking on the singular freshness of the most important despatches? That was not curious. They were written on my sermon paper. I usually preach extempore, but not on the very greatest

occasions. I had, in fact, copied the legal documents the night before—yes, even to the wax seals and the signatures. My initials as copyist were upon them all, though minutely written, I confess. I did not feel justified in presenting you with the real things until you had exchanged for them an equivalent that would enable me to extend my sphere of well-doing. Though certain original papers written by your late son have perished, the vitals of this matter were not burned. In fact, here they are. Lock them up, Sir Archer; lock them up carefully, before you see your dear granddaughter again!"

Mr. Newte produced a packet of papers, waved them over his head, and then gave them without reserve into the thin hand stretched towards him.

"Thus does heaven watch over us, and look to it that the will of Providence shall not be frustrated by a hasty action," said the pastor.

The old man's eyes devoured certain ancient manuscripts. There was no doubting these. They bore the marks of truth and time.

"Thank the Lord—thank the Lord!" he murmured.

"I hope you will, Sir Archer," answered Alpheus Newte. Then he rose to depart.

"I must go now," he declared. "Yet, in the interests of the community, I cannot leave you empty-handed. You would not wish me to do so. By withholding these papers until the present I have mercifully prevented a great wrong; and I have, I think, done you a practical service."

"You have," answered the other.

Then he rose, placed the papers far from the fire, looked about him nervously, as though Sibella might still be at hand, and went to his desk.

"I am going to give you five thousand pounds," he said.

"A thank-offering quite worthy of you, Sir Archer. The spending of that majestic sum you may safely leave to me. Not a penny shall be misplaced. Five thousand pounds! I had almost said 'five thousand souls'! Will you also give me a note to your bankers? They might hesitate at cashing such a remarkable cheque without special authorisation."

Sir Archer obeyed; then Mr. Newte perceived

that the knight desired to be alone and prepared to depart.

"Shake hands," said the old man. "I never thought that you or any fellow-creature would have the power to do me such a mighty service. And it is the greater that I thought all lost."

"The lion and the mouse, Sir Archer."

"One word more. You possess a knowledge of human nature, rather rare in those whose duty it is to instruct humanity concerning the laws of God. You are in fact a sociologist. Tell me, that I may compare your opinion with the reality, what will be my next step in your judgment?"

Mr. Newte showed not so much as the wink of an eyelash, though his soul laughed within him.

"It would take a man of deeper understanding and more subtle mind than myself, Sir Archer, to prophesy the conduct of such as you in this crisis; but, having regard for probability, and judging from your character as it is set out in your daily life, and reflected in the simple trust and regard of all those who look to you as their master and controller under Providence, I should say that you might very possibly seize this occasion to do a great action. I can easily

picture you rising above both ancient prejudices and ancient wrongs; I can see you setting an example to all men by a noble and exalted attitude before this event. The exact course you may be pleased to take is not for an inferior mind to predict. You might, for instance, transmit an ultimatum in shape of a letter; you might desire the presence of your granddaughter and convey your intentions to her; you might seek out this lady, Mrs. Gilbert, in person —yes, you frown upon me, Sir Archer, but positively your nobility of character might soar to that honourable and harmonious deed—though I see you doubt it yourself. It is not for me to preach to one from whom I have learned so much; but you invited my opinion as to possibilities, and I speak fearlessly because I am in the presence of a gentleman. Would that there were more such men amongst us! You will do what your own high judgment prompts, Sir Archer; and of this I am as sure as that I shall always remain your debtor—your judgment will not err. An ancient and futile feud rests with you to extinguish. My faith in you is such that already I see your high determination in your eyes!

Good-morning, Sir Archer; the Lord bless you and keep you, and all good men!"

Mr. Newte, upon this speech, departed without giving his hearer time to make answer. He felt that it would best chime with the old knight's inclinations at that juncture not to reply. Alpheus had spoken out of sheer good-will. His worst enemy could have found no sinister or selfish object in this final utterance. He had used his best wits first on behalf of himself, then for Mary Gilbert, and for this old man in the third place. The adventurer had received measure far beyond his expectations; and as often happens when success overtakes a rascal of this pattern, enthusiasm for humanity at large awakes within him, and he will do any soul a service with a ready heart and perfect faith, warmed to kindness by natural good-humour and the sun of prosperity.

Before three o'clock on this eventful day Mr. Newte found himself at Exeter; whereupon, driving to a banking establishment of old fame, he presented his credentials, cashed his cheque and elected to take his money in notes of small value, as being most convenient for general purposes.

He slept in London, and when, during the following day, a constable sought him at Lower Marldon, that he might be haled before Sir Archer Baskerville upon Crab Hatherley's charges, Alpheus Newte had clean vanished from his old haunts for ever, and was no more to be discovered than the plump apples of a bygone autumn.

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER TREE PLANTED.

MRS. GILBERT and her son were waiting for Sibella's return from the Court. There had come for the girl a letter carried by a footman in the Baskerville livery—a communication set forth in the somewhat shaky yet distinguished caligraphy of Sir Archer himself. He gave no particulars of his recent interview with Mr. Newte; indeed, he told Sibella nothing save that he desired to see her once more; and the maiden, feeling it not possible to refuse a courteous request, stood again in the company of her grandfather. Her very presence lightened the old man's heart, while he found the picture that she had left within his mind, albeit vivid enough, pale to a shadow before the bright reality. His ear was quick to estimate the extent of her education, and the hold of the Devon accent upon her tongue. In both matters he found that facts were more hopeful than his anticipation.

From the first he adopted a changed tone with Sibella, for with the indubitable proofs of her parentage in his care, he could take a stronger hand. Yet a great new-born love for her chiefly marked each utterance.

The whole gist of the matter best appears at Sibella's subsequent meeting with her sweetheart. To him she came in a mighty flutter and told her story forcibly enough. Happily Mary Gilbert was also present at the telling, otherwise the unaided indignation of these lovers had perchance again come to a wrong decision at this critical stage of their fortunes.

"First," said Sibella, "first, and worst of all, that wretched Mr. Newte's disappearance is explained. Who was it said that he had been called to a higher sphere? The truth is that he went to Sir Archer before Joshua Hatherley's confession about my thousand pounds was made public, and got my grandfather to give him more money. How much I do not know, but probably a good deal, for my grandfather—yes, Dick, he's got to be that—is quite delighted with Alpheus Newte. In spite of this disgraceful robbery of the money that poor

dear old Granny Thomasin left me—in spite of his taking that—Sir Archer talks of him as a man quite out of the common! He began about him the moment I went in, and said that he had undoubtedly made a mistake in Mr. Newte's character, and that, though Johnny Fortnight sprang from the masses and was appallingly unctuous and apparently of the lowest possible birth, yet his natural good sense and knowledge of human nature entitled him to no small amount of credit. Actually he said these things to me! Then, when I asked him about my thousand pounds, he answered that it was a detail which might probably be cleared up, and that, for his part, he should not judge any man uncharitably until the opportunity has been given him to explain. Of course, if he is to have a chance of explaining, he'll do it with the greatest ease, and make a sermon of it, and forgive everybody, and keep the money. In fact Sir Archer simply wouldn't see the real reason why Mr. Newte has disappeared. And he wouldn't hear me when I said that I knew a good deal more about the fat wretch than he did. And he feels perfectly sure that Mr. Newte will be back again in a few days;

though in secret I think grandfather rather hopes he won't come back at all. After that the real truth burst upon me. Those papers I burned—they were nearly all copied; at least, the important legal ones. Mr. Newte had the originals all the while, and now Sir Archer has them."

"Good Lord!" groaned Richard. "Then the man can prove that you are his granddaughter when he pleases?"

"Yes; and he was very firm and short with me when I spoke about it. He praised me for burning the first; but he said that Providence was on his side, and that I couldn't make another bonfire of myself even if I wished to. He was very different. I do think he is fond of me; but he made it quite clear that he was in the right, and meant me to obey him. 'I'm your lawful guardian henceforth until you come of age, Sibella,' he said, 'and I mean to do my duty.'"

"And what does he call his duty?" asked young Gilbert, bitterly. "To drag us apart, of course," he continued. "Yet you can calmly, critically say you think the old man is fond of you."

"His duty didn't seem to extend to you, Richard

After he had talked a good deal I calmly reminded him of you. But I'll come to that. First, he behaved like a sort of schoolmaster and asked me what I knew, and sighed to find it was so little. Then he said: 'Sibella, my child, you have to thank an eccentric and unkind parent for this most unfortunate state of things. Here are you, nineteen years old, or nearly, and you know practically nothing.' I told him that I could keep accounts, as he would see by the Compton Castle book, where visitors are entered—and their sixpences. I told him I could cook and darn, and understood a kitchen garden, and could sing, and could walk fifteen miles any day without being tired. He said that probably no accomplishment lacked its proper uses, but that I should have no more need for any of these gifts, except my voice. Then he calmly made a most terrible proposal, Richard. I hardly thought I could be hearing aright until he repeated it."

"To pack you off to learn rubbish, of course."

"To send me away to the Continent—for five years."

"Five years, Sibella!"

"Then I shall be twenty-four. I pointed that

out; yet even such a terrible thought did not make him change his mind. My brain is to be worked at by professors of every description. They are to teach me to sing and play and talk foreign languages and all the rest of it. And my grandfather is coming to look after me."

"It 's iniquitous in a free country! The man must be made of iron. And our banns to be called next Sunday!"

"He went on to say that at four-and-twenty I might be a girl worth marrying. Yes, he said that, Richard; and then it was I told him again how I had promised to be your wife before Heaven, and how I would be, sooner or later, if I lived through the plans he had arranged for me."

"I can very well guess the answer he made to that."

"I 'm very, very certain you can do no such thing, dear Dick. He said: 'Ah, Mr. Richard Gilbert, of the historic family of Gilbert. Well, I 'm not a stone, Sibella. We are none of us perfect. Whether this young man is worthy of the ancestry he claims, we shall now very soon discover. You proved by your high-spirited conduct that you were a Basker-

ville; let Mr. Richard Gilbert now show himself a credit to his famous name. He must take himself very seriously, I promise you, if he aspires to my Sibella; he must hold his head by many degrees higher than formerly.'"

"In fact, he'd send me to school too, if he could, perhaps."

"I'm perfectly certain he would, if he could, dearest Richard. I never felt so dreadfully young in my life as I did while he was talking about us—especially you. 'This boy,' he said, 'must occupy the forthcoming years of his life as his own natural sense and judgment shall prompt him.' He gave you that credit, Dick."

"He gave my mother that credit, you mean."

"Well, I cannot say what was passing through his grey, old head. I only know that he looked at me as if he loved me, and he spoke of you quite respectfully. He would hear no word against his plan; indeed, I was too much bewildered and dazed to say a word. 'I'll give you a week to decide, and then I'll ask you to come and see me again,' he said; and he added, not knowing that your leg was broken, that if I was of his

mind, I might bring Mr. Richard Gilbert with me. 'If not, come alone,' he said. And even in that solemn moment I couldn't help laughing, in my heart, to hear him keep on calling you 'Mr. Richard Gilbert.' It seemed as if he was a schoolmaster, and ought to have been talking about 'Master' Richard Gilbert. It was rather horrid to feel so very young, yet he made me. I pictured us walking up there together in pinafores—me with tails down my back, and you in little knickerbockers. He corrected my grammar, as it was, twice; but there were tears in his eyes all the time; and he kissed me when I came away; and the thing is, what's to be done, dear mother, and you, dear Dick?"

"He wants to separate us," burst out Richard. "I may be a fool, but I can see that. He wants to get you off—God knows where—and marry you to somebody before I have a chance of seeing you again. I don't trust him. I can't forget his years and years of unkindness and revengefulness to mother. It's very well to play with our hearts like this; but it will end in playing with our souls. I'll withstand him to his face; I'll——"

"Richard," said Mrs. Gilbert, "link his one word

with another, take the gathered meaning of all, and don't rage foolishly at nought. 'Tis Sibella's fun that's made you angry—not Baskerville's sense. He's wiser than ever I thought him. He'll take your breeding for granted if you'll only show him your nature. He'll judge you by yourself, as man should judge man, and he will receive you as one gentleman should receive another. He said: 'We are none of us perfect.' 'Tis the only time on record that ever he admitted as much. A very great sign of grace in such a stiff-necked man. Call to mind the generations of his kindred that have hardened their hearts and been used to hold themselves of finer clay than common folks. There are centuries of pride boiled down into that one soul. Yet this dinky maid here wins from him the spoken truth that none of us are perfect."

"I told him frankly that you had got a deal more learning than me, Richard; and he said that was well. When he hears you speak, he 'll see the man you are. And the rest is left just between you and me, Dick. You're not afraid of five years? My heart knows I'm not! I'd trust you for all time, my own."

"It's a cruel, bitter blow; and the years must be an eternity to a man who loves as I do—living death for five long centuries rather than years."

"Not death, sweetheart, lesson-books."

"I'm too old to dance to scholars' tunes now," he said. "A plain man, with no ambition to be other than I am, or my father was."

"That's high enough for any man to range, Richard," said his mother softly: "keep your father before your eyes; copy him, and you may stand with the highest. You are at least a Gilbert, and, whether you can trace kinship with the mighty that lorded it here in time past or whether you cannot, 'tis very certain that Gregory Gilbert was your father. Let Sir Archer Baskerville find out what, by the mercy of the Lord, he says he is willing to find out. Bear yourself like a man before him and before this great happening; and rejoice that you have a chance you never bargained for, to show the grit that's in you. Sibella, here, is ready to face it. She's strong, and goes to do the will of the Lord with a faith that would move mountains out of her path—ay, and a love that no book-learning will lessen. Be you less great of heart?

Be your love less? I know better, my son, for I know your father and I know myself."

A silence fell upon them. Sibella's eyes were brimming, and she held Dick's hand passionately clasped between her own; while he moved restlessly in his bed until a sudden reminder from his broken leg steadied him.

"So be it," he said presently. "'Tis vain to think that my father's son can ever win respect from Sir Archer Baskerville; but, win or lose, God helping, I 'll deserve his good word. Cry no more, Sib—my Sib still—my Sib always. Time is only a pleasant playmate so long as folks are young. I never pretended I was worthy of you, sweet; still, come five years, I 'll try to be better worthy, not less."

"The days will roll away so quick, Richard—and —and I 'll come back and find you a Justice of the Peace and all manner of things."

"Five years on your father's road, Richard," murmured his mother.

"And my girl at the goal," he said.

Mary Gilbert went out and left them then. From force of habit she passed into the orchard and,

walking with her thoughts, reached the ruined tree where it lay not far from a gate that opened upon the highway. Severed from its shattered stump, the fallen fruit-bearer awaited axe and saw. Lying against it, with roots still snugly wrapped in straw, was the sprightly sapling destined to take its place. That morning Tim Blake had "stubbed out the mores" of the defunct patriarch, and the abode of the young new-comer was prepared for it.

A robin's song filled the silence, and breath of autumn crept in opal hazes among the grey tree-trunks. Then there came rolling of wheels, and the chocolate and yellow chariot of Sir Archer Baskerville passed the orchard gate. Mrs. Gilbert did not turn, nor had the occupant of the carriage seen her in the dusk, but a footman upon the box observed Mary Gilbert, bid the coachman stop and, dismounting, explained to his master that she whom he sought was hard by among the fruit-trees. Well pleased to learn the fact, Sir Archer alighted, bid his coachman drive to the end of the lane, entered the orchard and approached the woman standing there. He uncovered his head as he reached her side.

"Mary Gilbert," he said, "I have come to know whether it may be peace between us at the last, or whether it is too late?"

He half offered his hand, and she took it and held it a moment.

"Man! man!" she answered, "do you need to ask me? Do women like me make war on those that loved them? I have prayed for this through many years."

"It is peace. You forgive me? No need to ask that either. May the Lord God be as generous to me as you have been, for my record is evil. But I will atone as I can. The past is past, and past praying for. The future—they shall be man and wife if they keep in that mind. I only ask for time."

"And I have said to them that you were very wise to ask it. I upheld you with all my might. Both will face life the stronger and wiser for that waiting."

"But should I pass away before the time, may I ask you to carry out my wishes?" he said.

"'Tis done," she answered. "The boy and girl both stand with faces to their duty. They desire

to justify themselves in your eyes and in the sight of all, and show what manner of man and woman they be."

"And you have forgiven my wickedness?"

"These forty years."

He bowed again.

"Your sad and penitent friend henceforth," he said.

Once more she extended her hand to him, and he took it between his own and bent slightly over it. Then he walked slowly away, and the orchard gate fell too noisily behind him. His carriage drove up to him, and he entered it and was gone.

To the woman mists hiding memory arose and dislimned, as clouds ascend and vanish above some summer river at dawn; and clear beneath them shone forth—no picture of this man under his burden of threescore years and ten, but the passionate youth he had been, and the frantic figure of him as last he swept away from her, near half a century ago.

Now there had come peace between them, and from her soul rose a high song of thankfulness for ancient prayers answered at last.

"Joy in my heart," she thought, "and joy in my dear man's spirit too; for, looking down on me, and ever longing for me to come back to him, 'tis certain this glad news will bring balm to him also, and make the place of waiting brighter."

A figure moved through the gloaming among the trees, and Mrs. Gilbert knew it for Tim Blake, and called the labourer to her.

"Come you here, Timothy," she said, "and cut these bands away and plant this tree in the place prepared for it."

"Me, mum! I thought 'twas to wait till the weddin' day, and be set up by Maister Dick's missus."

"No, 'twill not stand for that," she said; and, after a moment of silence, continued: "You are one that does God's pleasure, Timothy, for your eye is single and you live without angering any man. The trees know your planting; and none, save only my husband, ever had a more tender hand with young roots than have you."

"'Tis a great deed to put up a generous, fruit-bearing tree, mum; and I hope as them what eat and drink of the apples long after I be dust will

spare a thought to me here an' theer. Be thicky sapling to stand for any high purpose, if a man may ax? Many a brave bearer in this orchard do, as be well knawn."

"It will stand for the patience and long-suffering of Heaven," answered Mary Gilbert. "It will stand for a frozen soul that has been thawed on a sudden by the touch of God's own finger. It will stand for a wonder of Nature—a man, proud as Lucifer from the womb, who has asked his fellow-creature to forgive him now that he be old. And my heart is very full—full to bursting—a thing I'd never whisper to none but you, Timothy. Dig here; plant loving-like; and God A'mighty make airth sweet to the young root and sun kind to the flower-buds that wait for Spring."

THE END.

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